Crop of Salt

By

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**table of contents**

Another Part of the House  
Writ in the Sky by Birds  
I Don’t Like The Way Jack Gilbert Writes About Women  
Blessed Are the Cheese Makers  
Why Don’t You  
Vulture  
What Daddy Remembers I  
Americus Columbus Studstil, known as Mac for short, raised my Granny.  
What Grows Under a Curving  
Prayer of the Limb  
What Daddy Remembers II  
A Pink Mobile Home  
I’ve Never Slept Well in the House My Father Built  
Though the oyster is mostly a shell, it is whole  
What Daddy Remembers III  
* A way to save it  
Self-Compassion  
Grazing  
What Daddy Remembers IV  
What Kind of Cousin  
If asked about my childhood  
In His Own Image  
On a Walk With You, Whom I Like  
Logical Explanations  
Old With You  
Citrus, Delicious  
Headlines of Clippings My Father Mails Me  
This chicken is a monster  
What Daddy Remembers V  
Manners  
A Hungry American Girl  
I Was Maybe Afraid of Her  
Explaining You To Other People  
What Daddy Remembers VI  
Consanguinity  
There are upward one million feral pigs in Florida.  
I’ve begun to feel the scratchy interior of my skull and that is worrisome.  
Darwin’s Doing  
I can become my own with something more than joy.
Another Part of the House

Heat-hush looms like wisteria
   over a southern spring, carries

a sweetness that catches me home—
toes on simmering porch wood and nails.

      Mother or father or someother off
searching bathroom shelves for iodine. Or
standing still in the kitchen,

dishes obediently drip-drying in the sink:

teasing out
the memory of bodies      young

from the endless honeycomb
of afternoon,
      rooms within rooms.
Writ in the Sky by Birds

My mother makes decisions like other people swim. Splash, flail, a little kick—
but no forward movement. She floats. Which is good because she saves energy
and soaks up the two blue domes above and beneath her. Reserves the right to change
back into a fish or give up the effort altogether.

Still, she works like she can divine the future, the sea. The dead must be done with.
Bent over with a spade and hatchet, she prunes back the salvia, the hydrangea,
the butterfly bush. Piles of sticks bloom around her knees.
Toenails are cut to the quick. The big toe on her left foot dipped in blue rot
is stripped clean. Curved clips of keratin jump from her like fleas
and burrow into the sides of the house. Parasites. She trims mine too.

Closets are roadblock and are turned out, emptied, abandoned to the street. They’ll make it
or they won’t. I take the rings. She waffles.
I Don’t Like The Way Jack Gilbert Writes About Women

Jack Gilbert says shiploads of thuya are what my body wants to say to your body.

Thuya are coniferous trees. With sharp scale leaves and cone studded limbs. And shiploads. That would crush you.

No, Gilbert only knew when to use proper nouns. How to write about places that weren’t his own. Nothing about my or your body. Which demands three stalks of lavender circling the timbre of hip bone.
Blessed Are the Cheese Makers

To eat a quesadilla with no remorse
is to name and celebrate
the god in you.

There It is living
in your mouth. Thin tortilla
on tongue; refried beans and cheese

melted into one smear
song of carb and joy and proof
of the thousand ways milk fat brings glory (praise the cow).
Why Don’t You

pinch off your freckles, wear them as a crown
weld a cleaver to your forearm so as to always be a cut above the rest

sew false eyelashes out of iris petals, tinge your vision with lavender cream

limp with fish fins into a city street and stop all the rush of wheels
with your bizarre scales, warped evolution

come home from work
floss your joints with velvet pulled

from a fox hunt tapestry
commissioned by a nondescript medieval lord.
(the fiber carries 500 years of looking and will erase all scars incurred)

dole out teaspoons full of soap into all the punch bowls at dinner parties
gnaw on candles to turn wrinkles into wax
stop touching your face

wrap strips of bacon around your neck so as to always have a snack and be alluring

speak backwards for a year to eliminate nostalgia
shower in champagne, drink liquid gold

harass the breeze

until it whimpers at your heels
lampoon your father on wrought iron. look! the martyr he always wanted to be
leave your house

---

1 title taken from Diana Vreeland’s first column in Harper’s Bazzarr
Gravel eyes, you say
the devil has
but they are reflective blue
like a deep
river that doesn’t move.
No deals in fire. Nothing red
even to match the disguise.
Ashen face and hands. You described the devil
as a man. It isn’t. They aren’t.
The devil is a ghost only
a dance in air and mist.
No body to speak of,
but still something of a three-button suit.
Something of a backroom
and a bargain. A dirt road:
the granules worn into powder,
a child in a ruffled nightgown running from it.
What Daddy Remembers

I.

surrender

in a 1936 Chevrolet 4 door sedan. Swollen weight

woman

early I heard saved both born

stuck many carry that name

wonder any lay claim to a gun

a boozer, but city fathers want their

favorite son notorious, even more so.

---

2 This is the first section of an erasure series spread throughout this manuscript of the first chapter of my father’s memoir.
Americus Columbus Studstill, known as Mac for short, raised my Granny.

wiregrass reaching out lengths in dry clumps, green straw
tickling the wet warmth moving low between the pine
trees—

Americus Columbus Studstill was baptized four years after
the Civil War in the Little Choctawhatchee River
by a man named Paul who his mama, Winnie Lee, thought was too well
dressed to be a good preacher but smiled, said yes, sewed
wedding lace for the gown.

no cornstalks coaxed from the ground into standing
armies of praying mantises only pigs, potatoes, mustard greens,
some tobacco to smoke and sell—

Americus Columbus Studstill learned how to till at ten;
easing the plow down behind the ox, testing the soil
mud with the balls of his feet, how easy
is the give.

peach light fragile and cresting behind the yellow
farm house, the one hundred and fifty acres, stuck-viscous
globs, resin droplets for a pair of patent leather shoes—

Americus Columbus Studstill jiggling my Granny
on his knee, belly round whispering poison,
prayers, habits my hand may still recall;
while her Granny scrapes that week’s breakfast fat from

the skillet with a hunting knife that my Uncle Bobby
would one day pull from his Wrangler utility belt,

point at me and then the fish, blade-gleam on glimmer-flesh,
saying kill it. Kill it dead. Slice down but not through the backbone.
What Grows Under a Curving

fishing line

cast into the river

tied down with wedding rings

tricks that make a meal

out of cupboard string

salt divine

caked into creases

knuckles work out

a worry knot

in the cast net
a once-was river bed

soaked muck

stone broken into stone is again stone

deify the spine and its ingenuity

for the face

everywhere is familiar

lingerie crumples,

arms loosed from their sockets

into silk puddles
labor toil

another throne collapses

devastation

several seas from here

maintain ether

the interior molten warmth

bring forth and what cannot be brought

there is never new water
on the back of this world
Prayer of the Limb

Reverence, be loud:
raucous buzz, pop in muscles; a dance floor.

Be stretch.

Tight yawn and crank of crawl space
behind my shoulder blades.

Be hush.

Naked-stare into the bedroom mirror
after returning from the night.

Be firm, unyielding.

Peel others’ palms
from my thighs like sweaty spanks.

O praise the pause—

leaves lit in yellow glow
of porch lamp, left on.
What Daddy Remembers

II.

seas
brought
breath
a century earlier. She would
go on to say not only

was yet to come
surface

detrimental to
a strain

Whopping can kill.
detrimental to

Mama
afraid to put me down

afraid
She had to carry me even while
A Pink Mobile Home

Women’s lips.
Framed and ranging from barely parted—
just space enough to slip a strip of bacon in between
the moist muscles painted pillows

to smiling—
white bricks plastered together
in neat rows a picket fence without a gate

to full gaping oh—
canyon of want airbrushed free
of saliva only warm dark.

Inside, there is pink carpet,
seashells, faux wood paneling,
and more than forty pairs of lips.

Women’s lips and a man alone with scissors,
stacks of magazines,
tiny slivers of paper stuck to his shirt.
Labia oris crush him in his sleep;
gloss drips over his swollen abdomen, seam of inner thigh,
and stiffens. Each heated hue smears a mark.
I’ve Never Slept Well in the House My Father Built

My knotted calf screeches in the middle

of the night, an outburst

against still air and footsteps

moving across the floor above me,
quiet like a rock

moving through glass.
The room next to mine is filled with slave art;

the artifacts prove me culprit. I try to empty—

fixate on the curling notes of water
that percolate from somewhere beyond the yard and walls of stolen wood.

But moonlight drenches, rattles the room; harsh and rippled.
A stark god.

When I was small in the dark,

my bed spun on a dial

tree limbs blurred into arms, legs
and strolled past the windows. An army on the move.
Though the oyster is mostly a shell, it is whole

Though you are mostly shell, you’re whole.
Though your two halves are only suctioned together for a brief while.
Though your little mouth opens only a little it allows whole oceans.
Though the oceans are tempered with water scrubbed clean of salt.
Though you wait in splendid passivity for flecks of plankton, bacteria, organic matter, detritus.
Though after every meal, you have another.
Though the men with blue rubber-gloved hands barred me from the buckets full of bodies.
Though daddy pulled me aside, showed me how to hold the knife, pry the animal open at the hinge.
Though my blood crept over your oval body.
Though you are a lump.
Though you pop.
Though at five and seven, I climbed shell mountains and chalk rose like steam.
Though thousands of you being dumped from a truck sounds like river roar.
Though I held and hold, the rocky exterior to my lips and dip carcass backwards slightly, sliding briny slug smooth down my throat.
Though I can always slurp another.
Though Sergius Orata bread you on the roof of his house; would place his Roman ear to the unbroken surface of the sulfur bath water, listen for gurgling.
Though you gleam dully in pearl grey.
Though you are really a clam, bivalve mollusk.
Though I once believed you a snail.
Though the old sea witch reads sweat, frayed rope in your face.
Though I used to fear your slime, swallowing you alive.
Though this is because a tourist hurled grey muck onto beach sand.
Though you are a combination of rumor and change over time.
Though you are ancient.
Though you are bone. And mucus.
Though you can be true, pearl. Thorny, pilgrim, saddle, and windowpane.
Though I can barely distinguish an Apalachicola from a Calabash.
Though there are shy shades of pink ridging your sides and a streak of green pulses across the meat of your center.
Though one Christmas I glued your hollowed halves together to make angels; they hung crooked from red ribbon.
Though your countenance is crooked and spiked and swirling.
Though your death is dry.
Though even alive you appear lifeless.
Though your heart is three-chambered and must be smaller than my fingernail; it pumps steady and colorless.
Though porcelain is inside of you.
Though you drag yourself along the sea bottom on one slow, sucking foot.
Though you only move when you are young, like most of us.
Though my tongue must feel familial.
Though you must realize the betrayal.
Though I once dreamed you grew large enough to gulp dozens of me.
Though marsh reeds and bottom feeder is your only speech.
Though you sing a mud-song.
Though I wait to hear more.
Though you ignore me and my advances.
What Daddy Remembers

III

one small problem

Monticello Montisella

azelas and boxwoods pecan and Tung orchards.

the only paved roads were the two-lane federal highways

shellacs and varnishes

bills paid in piglets, eggs or butter.

Mama gave birth to more

umbilical cord

slow inside her. horrific

As the old country
A way to save it

The pomegranate bought yesterday is putrid. It agitates the air.

Turn it into pie, cobbler or roast seeds for a supper garnish?
No.

She raps the decision out across the dried rose rind. Won’t do. A thump.
Dead thud, a Satsuma hitting the wall above her shoulder? Her heels bounce.
A bobble-head in reverse. Clump of red falling. Leaves in summer?
the underside of her hair is damp against the landing strip of her neck and

last night he threw off even the sheets; the baby whined.

Must be a cardinal at the window.

Smacked into glass full force, whole.

She wraps the stunned-still wings in a kitchen towel
as if the bird was wet from birth, the red askew begins to squirm.

She carries the tremulous in swift strides to where the jasmine curls.
The fruit.

He will ask for the receipt.

Like the it will be a knock
down drag out
Bundle released into
Back to the rot,
     puddle of pink leak

and again the green traverse.
Time enough before he
She digs

a grave, deposits the fruit carcass.
Pats dirt down,

car keys clanging
like a wind chime or
cat collar bells.

Time enough at least for a return trip to the grocery.
Self-Compassion

How does pleasure fall? Like a tree.
Like an engine any kind of engine even a boat engine

she asks and answers.
Out of spite we named it
a crutch; a cushion. The texture

recalls green mist whispering up a hill
spritz on your face as you are
striding up and over

the incline. Which is more
than an attempt to move into open.
Cradle the ginger

taste of your own will;
its bite.
Grazing

Goats running up or down the narrow dirt road somewhere between a stampede and a trot, pulling at grasses as they go by in browns, whites, blacks. A man on a motorcycle directs them—chugs the rear: Ya. Ella, ella.

Goats beating their heads against rocks. Horns scrape against fences their legs are too short to jump.

Goats in grid deadlock on tiny patches of dull green. What’s left of fields, everything eaten down to a narrow ledge.

Goats bleat their outrage over hands grabbing utters that drag full in the dirt. Pinch, tug at nipples. Snap at ears resting on their heaving sides.

Goats moving across a hill in a diagonal of ringing. Strangled lament of human-child cries erupt from mischief pointed faces, peal back the soft evening like an overripe banana.

Goats, champions of the mountain. Goats, a herd of wind chimes, a train of bells. Goats stand still.
What Daddy Remembers

IV

children years ago not too over
surely not skinny. missing front teeth a snuff
habit. She liked me best.

tobacco juice
cold water
old day couch screen porch children
crawl up

daddy dive and swim

hot summer
cold water
spring fed and the color of weak tea
daddy dive and swim

someone
missing

under water
and survived.

urging
What Kind of Cousin

Blur of pool and concrete; big hands grab bathing suit bottom. Quick like a fish, I dive down out of reach. Fear and something stranger, something tiled and exposed like when Morgan Sauls walked in on me on the toilet. I can sit on the vinyl floor long enough to scare, long enough to win. Blue light wavering in diamonds; clear enough to see the hair on his calves, tiny strings of pearls. I’ve seen butts and vaginas before he crouches on the precipice, the slope between shallow and deep. Pale skin. Daddy hollers form the porch and it’s over, we get out. Chlorine-sputter; snot dribbles down my lips and chin. I pull my body from the water using the curved metal ladder as leverage, a shaky haul and suction like pulling the plug in a too full bathtub. We eat sandwiches. I know I’m better at swimming at holding my breath. Lungs extend their pink, press my ribs full of breath and bubbles.
If asked about my childhood

I.

My shoulder churns, grinds in its socket.
This is like a bone in a bowl circling around the rim, singing.
Peer into my smooth vestibular,
where time is balanced and kept at a distance.
At the supper table,
leg bouncing and sweat dripping,
my father is shirtless.

II.

His thin chest hair is comical, arbitrary. I call him Daddy but cannot write it.
He talks at the three inches of air between my right shoulder and earlobe.

III.

Circumnavigate the names of two hundred dark haired relatives; there is no center
but a clamor swells,
volley over jostling heads.

   Cousins do not end until they do
disappear.
   I have crawled
into the azalea thicket, turning petals into tongues.
A they ends up wedged—

   stretches a room out and sets up chairs, carpet, a coffee table.
   A chorus of beige and off-white. Such a house itches.
   The walls continue to hold, loyal, smelling of nothing;

except faintly, a trace of wet soil makes a curving start
in-between my nose and throat, locus of scent and residue.

IV.

I remember learning

from someone older what kind of pause means no,
how to kiss convincingly, hold in my stomach.

The heftiest bet is always placed squarely
on the sleek body,
who or whomever moves in the cleanest lines.

I’ve always wanted glory. A blue ribbon
a wreath of roses.

My joints chirp not like a bird
but a bat squeak, muffled whir of wings.

V

The television screen is a wet blur. It grinds my pupils
into sediment grain, scatters Technicolor across my face,
seeps in dyes & illuminates new escapes.

VI

My hair eschewed mother’s brush.
In the bathroom mirror only

my forehead and eyes were visible,
a receding horizon, bangs.

My whole everything held there between and under my brows.
In His Own Image

Red stilettoes bejeweled and sharp, glisten like blood running from the crown of thorns; Jesus is reborn.

Writs turn slim, grace all and foot washing. Same thrill of Paul’s calf but legs stockinged. A hot pink mini-skirt can be salvation, thus spoke the deity. Jesus sashays divine, hips jut and his face is hairless. Cream.

Converts come easy, when your mouth is absurd, plush and your teased hair tall enough to touch God. Jesus preached & gathered light into the hearts of men with his eyelids painted blue,

he can turn water into anything his eyelids are so blue over his brown salt of the earth eyes. Eyelid oceans,

Jesus winked Romans into kneeling. They bend in half over pool tables. Prostrate for a dark pocket of song (lip sung or otherwise). Circumcise your hearts, therefore and do not cheat at cards any longer. Still peace, earth, yes, love, yes, unto men, Jesus blows kisses.
On a Walk With You, Whom I Like

Desire is a delayed promise
but I don’t really believe that. Demand pleasure anyways

in the still, torrential wood, the tender mulch, green moss.
In walking: regular beat-sway of my feet and hips, forward
movement, my knees working beneath me.

Pleasure in the air. How it pulses
with flittering insect call and response
echoes. This is also the sound of the sun—

it’s surface buzzing with heat like the back of my neck, tangled inside
of my lower abdomen. Splotches rising along the coastline of my collarbone
like washed up seaweed or a red algae bloom.

Tell me about your mother, what grade she teaches. How you remember her yellow
hair cut short, prickly like dry grass. The fluted columns of your grandparents’ colonial.
And because you are gentle and brave you will tell it gently. While

I, cruel
Ruler of Remoselessness. Queen of Keeping It Cool.

I, afraid
Shaker in Boots. Calculator of Involved Risk.

will offer nothing in return but a comment on the moon, how pedestrian
are its comings and goings.
I’m certain everyone is sleeping with everyone but me.
My blank space of inner forearm is bitter
and sulks. It probably isn’t personal. Like, I’m a decent,
friendly sort who laughs
and buys bananas every Sunday.

It must be because I’m incapable
of polyamory; that and the abundance of coarse dark
hair that grows under my chin and on the sides of my neck.
What is up with that? I ask doctor

after doctor. Hirsutism: bringing you bearded
women since the fall
from paradise. Nothing abnormal; this could also be the problem.
I go to bed too early, take my meals square.
Zaina tells me to be more casual; people want people who don’t care

about making a good impression. All I do is make good
impressions. My tongue is cardboard.
My skin is cardboard. My eyes are cardboard.
The grocery store holds my romantic and sexual potential
in its clean, waxed vise.

My flirtations are handfuls of marbles,
round & clanking & translucent, or
they are quick peripheral glances. I keep tabs
but don’t engage. I enjoy being ignored;
I am a rusted hinge.
Old With You

We will grow our hair long and wear silk, keep a garden. I will forgive your noisy body when we are spinsters together. You will rise at four in the morning to brew coffee and reorganize our library, mumble over the alphabet. I will smoke (which you will hate) & memorize birds—flash of a yellow-rumped warbler in our honeysuckle. We collect rainwater sweetened by the heady bloom, bathe in its cool perfume. You will go first. In summer. The afternoon sun a ball of butter melting across you. I will turn a hundred gourds into birdhouses, hang them in your room.
Citrus, Delicious

Kumquats grow hot and round
in wet, bright light. A patch
of uninterrupted lawn or a coastline country
that is long like a finger in sand.
A toe-sized fruit
does not need the acres
of orchards dappling and dividing
land into rows of miniature canopies.
Headlines of Clippings My Father Mails Me

‘I Said I Went to Heaven
Because I Thought It Would Get Me
Attention.’ 100 Years of Coast to Coast

Calling, The Tape Never Lies An Ear
to the Ground. Earth’s Twins
Spotted, Icicles Partially Obscure the View

of the Gulf, Weird Florida 2014:
Fangate, naked crooks, Satanic
Display; After Ivan: Rebirth Follows
Tragedy. Our World
Would

Be Different Without the Amazing Moon,
The Power of Sleep. Pompeii

Scrolls Could Be
Readable—
Hindsight, the Exact
Science. Study: Any Running

Helps People Elude
Early Death. ‘Selma’ and
Why, Half a Century
Later, We’re Still

Struggling with the 1960s, Debt: A Major
Threat To Happy
Retirement. Caught

in the Act, A Civil War
Sisterhood of Undercover
Women, Ready

To Stop Wearing
Underwear? Golden Girl
Shoots for Miss
America Sunday—

Church Expresses New
Acceptance of Gays, Divorce, Our
Aging Nuclear Arsenal, Elite Horses. What
Happened to
Anticipation? When

the People Talk…,
From Top to
Bottom, Baring All, Time
Sits Still in Paris. Who
wants to

live (or die) on
Mars? 100 waiting
in line. Melbourne Area, A Hotbed
of Ancient Bones. Nobel. Women

Must Get Past
Being ‘Objects.’ Our

Brain Sees a Bigger
Moon Healing. Springs Still
Draw People Who Believe Whole
Grains Are Linked To

Longevity. Sure Don’t
Smell Like Tar, A Sneaky Snake—
Teams Hunt for Rock

Pythons. In Everglades, All in
the Swine of Duty. We Survive By
Going On
With Our Lives, Going
Swimmingly.
This chicken is a monster

claw talons, yellow-absurd
scales curving out and under each
other in lapping ripples, the metal
scalloped legs of a raptor or dragon.
what could be feather-tender is brittle
at its core. collapses under pressure.
there is only search and destroy:

    eyes seek, head snaps, body hops,
lurches, crashes over prey, thrusts
in ancient kinetic impulse, jaws
acute and wide and pitiless—

that screech is a roar,
townspeople! flee the disturbed
skin-rubber; wattles, combs, fleshy
caruncles. Idle-eyes, stupid.
What Daddy Remembers

V

a commotion in the hen house
a flashlight and that German Mouser.
red. She never missed.

aim
the carcasses of invaders

dig a deep hole.

I could see fire

behind my mother’s dress trouble

but

mama warned

nowhere in the pasture taking care

leave the henhouse full wire

life pounding in back to the henhouse
Manners

Yes sir I would say to the upstairs, offstage voice. Rolling t-shirts down the length of my body so they take up less space in your drawers. Yes sir I would say before closing my bedroom then my closet door, cloaking myself in slated light. Fabrics hung around me like moss-shadow.

Yes sir I would say holding the nail still. The back of your hands muddied with age, crinkled like tissue paper. Don’t slam, don’t smack. Yes sir. You speak, you answer.

Withholding the truth? Just the same as lying. Yes sir. The laundry should be done in the time it takes you to drive your truck to the grocery store;

a mile and a quarter.
I crouch to hold the screwdriver up to the front door, an offering to plea entrance.

The plunger is not clearing the striker, you explain, inspecting the knob torn loose from the wood, its mounting plate. And I would say yes sir.
A Hungry American Girl

walks wherever she goes.
Licks the center of her palms

with a fat wide cow tongue. Her skin is pink,
sticky. She is moist
under her arms
in the pockets between ribs.
Thighs rub until they scrape skin against skin raw.
She is never real in winter

as it is a waste of time.
Must surround and fill herself

with stuff. Shoplifts tubes of Pink Pigeon
and Damn Glamorous; saunters down department store aisles
fingers taping hangers into plastic ripples.

Makes up
three older siblings who live faraway and send presents
just because they like to.

Languor’s low
bored, freckled, loud.
Breaks out from
humidity and cheap foundation, picks
at the pus swelling.
A girl with the stomach of a bear

a bear who lives off what’s been thrown out—
Chinese food, banana peels, freezer burned fish, other girls.
She is entire ecosystems:

hormones ripple all down digestion
a million bacteria
tingle inside her ears
tiny tails of cilia.
Teases the bottom of her

lip like chewing gum. Nervous or working out the problem
of evading her mother.

Kisses her own mouth in the mirror—

3 This poem explores one kind of white girlhood in the US South.
cool glass cloying
smooth and clear as water on her tongue.
Blasphemes

and does not fear god as she was told to do. Under her bed,
she hides
copies of Cosmo, a fork, a half-hearted diary.

Decides it doesn’t matter
what she ends up doing as long as
she is the best

or one of the best
as long as people know
who she is and she is famous and all that.
Is only as good as she wants to be.
I Was Maybe Afraid of Her

There is no entering
such a fortress of steel.
She gulps sea, downs
what waves slosh up to her.

I watched her eat a lamb shank clean
to the bone, her first taste of meat in three years—
teeth tearing the tough muscle, I could hear
the tendons ripping. Gristle gone,
chewed too. Grease smeared
on her fresh cheek,
small pieces of overcooked flesh
on her flesh
clung like a fly
on the flanks of a horse.

Between the agapanthus and basil,
she buried the circle of bone.
Not for luck she warned.
Explaining You To Other People

I wish I could say that I was beyond you, the jokes,
our postage stamp of mud-grass, the tall tales

starring you as the cowboy & the outlaw & the farmer
& the solider & the inventor & the starving artist & the cuckold

& the pusher of envelopes & the freedom fighter
& always the victim.

I wish I could shrug off
the smiley faces made from square slices

of yellow cheese as a fluke. It would be
easier to explain if we had stopped
talking when I was sixteen. If I had ever actually said
anything to you, if you could listen, if you could be wrong.

I like to pretend that no part of me comes from you.
But I guess I’ve learned from you.

Resolve, sweat, strong skills of recall:
three hours spent on the side of the road

   in the Florida summer sun practicing long
   division problems in my head. You knew I was smarter,

   I was playing dumb. Reciting what you said word for
   word to prove I had been listening; spittle flecked

onto my grey cheeks from your face,
a cherry tomato roasting. When I was

fourteen, you used a nail polish brush to varnish
three long gator claws and made me a necklace. I loved it and

resented you, still not the monster
I imagined you to be. How you predicted my taste

for taxidermy, a fascination with previous lives, previous
deaths. I’ve watched you also

luxuriate in decay. What I want is a more
simple hate, a story that ends.
What Daddy Remembers

VI

a small child a mesh fence a lick
ward him off
Mama told

daddy fierce and quick
bellow beat
his own blows in
we moved to no night knew
Mama would cook on
the front porch preventing us wait by
the front door and rattle it. I can still see
all of us young’uns rattling that backdoor bellow and paw
when we return home Mama careful quiet
one by one go
in the old wringer
Consanguinity

Ahhhh against my mother’s long body—

varicose veins are raised rivers, leg’s topography.
Hair swings in stripes:
   the gradient soil readings mark shifts, rebirths.

Shirtsleeves warm with florals skim
   the curl of my ear and then flap like miniature
flags as she moves away,

   loping soft in her height.

We have back to go. Remember,
   we have back to go she says, turning her
head to count the distance in birds.

I want to ask is it good
   the weight of a child’s rump,
plump in your lap is it good, how good.
   You smell like cosmos growing taller

than the year before.
There are upward one million feral pigs in Florida.

a dead pig is a good pig.
they breed quick, grow fat quicker
and roam, run rampant in all 67 counties.

they’ve been in Florida since Hernando de Soto.
the Spanish came and left sow—
somebody’s been making bacon ever since.

golf course lawns are rooted raw
all that pristine green turf
turned up into mud slop.
and citrus groves are ragged with tracks,

roots scraped by hooves. the right people
get angry. and so we hunt them:

no season, no size limit,
just a rifle and a pick-up

is all. only a fraction find their way to a plate
because the USDA only believes in red tape and more
red tape. most rot into carcass waste.

money could be made, but those squealers
are a lot tougher to catch live with tails
and ears still wiggling.

my brother can slaughter.
even belongs to a small hunting club
and uses their smoke house.

a whole pig is a lot to eat.

feral pork is not that farm-raised pink stuff
no, this meat is dark, lean.
grown up in that damp soil, kudzu-fed
muscles turn tender.

hog road kill is regular now,
especially on the dirt roads that wind rocky
through the St. Joe paper company pineland.

occasionally I’ll pull over, just to size em up.
in July I got up close to a boar, dead two or three days,
a big one. I touched its spine
not its face, the face was too gruesome too gone.
long snout rippled with thick folds of rubber fat.

I’ve seen a group of 50 trot through a clearing, picture pigs
on the beach, jumping in waves, gulls scawing
at the scrap competition. reckon they can swim,
how else could they cross all those swamps.
I’ve begun to feel the scratchy interior of my skull and that is worrisome.

I am both inside and outside of the kitchen, minced. The smell of my body is sweet sulfur, I waft and linger in the place I learned everything I need to know.

The currency of moving sideways, a corner country enough to monitor the inside colors, where they have leapt.

I’m alone and mama is a ghost alive. I see her at the stove, mistook for a vapor.
Salt in boiling water. Motion of steam. Her whole a breeze. I carry it in my arms, the traces of pewter, leather, rain.
The bones of a stone crab. Torn bits of her knee-skin left scraped onto pavement. I’m lead by the crook in her nose, the rhythm of knives on cutting boards.
Darwin’s Doing

Awash with pious worship of biology,
I come to myself in early evening
like the whooping cranes
taught to migrate with motors.

Even I can be fooled by accurate machinery.
Naïve for ever expecting
  a metamorphosis, not a thing can be
peace or honey dew. So it’s no surprise I remain

the coral vine’s bursting
pink bite, gulping the porch of my father’s house,
  a medusa, a hall of bones.

I want to inherit all of this earth,
murder will be required—

a lover’s lungs removed intact and thrumming on a silver plate,
a living room painted red with the wet innards of rivals,
an execution delivered by my own thumb and forefinger.

The carotid artery is vulnerable & strung
along the jugular. I pinch it off.

Neither eviction nor evolution is clean. A thick sludge
  spreads over and out of me, moves soundless to steal
from the dirt and the dark. I will eat god with salt.
I can become my own with something more than joy⁴.

I can turn green,
green, green. Mosquitoes
in the shade. Body; a flooded wilderness.
But known, navigable—

    out sprout hurricane lilies
    hatching from the loam
    like red spiders.

Pitcher plants hang low with throat-gut.
Great tomb of rainfall, enzymes.

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⁴ Title inspired by something Emerson Rhudy said.