

Story 3,

Part 1: **shark**

1.

The first beast I saw...who was it? Ah yes my father. You laughed when, without my glasses, I said the dog looked like a person on all fours. you yelled at me for staring too hard... you thought it was the stare of a wolf, but really it was a dog's, waiting to be struck. I was happy when the two snakes coiled—happy that, in the small pocket where their two scales slid there might've been room for me, mediating between their two struggles.

...father, you are a beast. Mother you are a beast. Uncles, aunt—all beasts. Little cousins? beasts as well. Servility in your blood... I have tried to stoke rebellion in my blood, and even now I find it hard. I have those who testify that what I do will beggar the infinite...you don't know why you hold me back, have no idea who's past the fence and who's penned in, you beasts...how was I born among you all—

No, forget it. Not beasts. Animals. And I am not an animal but a beast. The world

Do you know what it's like, being a beast born from two animals? My birth and the first years glazed in them a visor that prevented them from seeing me as such. Still it stands, though its ends are cracked to all oblivion. They pitied me, aware of the toil I'd face being an animal to men. But a beast to men...

Beasts and men have more in common than animals. On the shore they notice the calming colors more than animals—are less preoccupied with coins—make noises without excuse—treat broken bones and hearts the same and find themselves a good death more often than a good life. Their thorns are just as much for themselves as for others, though men have prettier flowers. The beast hates man because they only see the rose, and the man the beast because her naked brutality threatens to expose the thorns he hides beneath the petals—what soft stamens, what vulnerable cores.

Beasts, animals—men. The animals shield them from each other, form the barrier—the middle ground between beasts and men. But the earth is round.

2.

Men multiply their slights into a world, and beasts flatten their pain into a thing as vocal as a yelp. Do they know what abominations they'll birth?

Had I been a beast among beasts, I could have lived with that. So, too, a man among men. But this unraveling, so slow and so unnoticeable, always to myself, only to mys—

Did they all know from the moment I was born? Does the beast headed opposite my path see what I can see? I've seen them talk with men...do they count it luck or right? Soon, they'll find themselves falling in the roses more often than not, picking the berries from the neighbor's yard like a forest...the sun, always in the sun and hunched as if their next step could finally take them to the freedom of all fours... finally see those men as huge trees to worship, their hearts the root of all their thick branches--and yet, the swelling fruit...I want all beasts to stand together and kneel, if only to bring out the tree's height.

3.

There is an elegance in the brutality and struggle of a fox how it takes a killing blow and seeks to die alone. How it retreats into the corner, licks its wounds, washes itself with its blood to give a fresh coat--sits down, curls its tail to hide its blush and dies.

I don't know what the wolf fucked to make the fox. Certainly something more refined, more bloody...perhaps the best candidate would be man--the ones who preferred uniform screens of red instead of gore--the ones who make a ritual of murder when they use the flayed skin as a barrier between the soil as the organs float on top, bathed in moonlight. We've all heard fables of a wolf's might--its blunt lies that any child could figure out. But the fox? is not a killer but a pest, something more removed from life or death--more apt to be observed. When I see it alone, far from the crude packs that wolves form, little in its prey, I see a sort of humanity--in its trickery, its intelligence, its sexuality...

It's possible that they cover up death with all their beauty leaving bare their calls.

4.

For a while I had the habit of going to a random place, picking any man and any woman and imagining what a child between them would look like. I didn't even imagine them naked, or even sex...all that fascinated me was nature, bonding two strangers together. What do we look like, up there? That people could seem so incompatible but so compatible—that no matter how things were, things *could* happen.

When I saw a girl pregnant, I would mold the man into her opposite, casting handsome men for ugly, short men for the tall. I imagined whole pasts, galleries of faces, all different all condensed in hers. Then, I'd add to it another face complex as hers—all into the child. Yet with all that divinity I could not shake the feeling of myself

There, polluting the beautiful—polluted by the flower and the nausea...a beast, frolicking among the elect. His blood is one of rapists and slaves, and hers has the pedigree of saints, heroes and the glorious. What else could be created but the poet?

I've loved the ones most different from me. To think that nature herself could twist our differences into a child—that all the differences of people were One difference...I didn't even think of what the child would grow into. The mere possibility was all I needed to be happy—knowing I carried a key that, for all its differences, could open up a multitude of vaults and fill them up with keys. On the shore, I've seen myself Broken by the foam webs. The meeting place of sea and sky, so tight when the waves are calm, then pulled on a high tide's chase...I often told her that I was going to return to the sea one day. Even pissed in it, the easiest way to fuse with the great gyres of the world.

There's a labor in all things. The sun and moon show up on time, and day and night topple each other; I don't need to remind myself that nature is a strong thing. But sometimes I forget how intelligent nature is when it mixes fabrics like they were made for each other. As miraculous as this might seem, her labor can only be done so many times before we're all mixed together. Only then does man bore nature. Only then she sleeps.

5.

Of course I thought about it. It made me, so why shouldn't I make it? Every parent knows their children have at least ONCE remade the scene, remembering the time that they began. No parent can help being a beast in their child's eyes, unless all they think about are their cells splitting in two.

When was the first time we saw a being birth asexually—
When was the first time we knew it? must've needed soft eyes to see. From the ones that knew of one act
One violent act, there lay so many smaller things that kill themselves by *becoming* their two children. Those smaller things in the air, on our skin—in our own bodies. Zoomed in
What sex is in humanity?

We come together. They come apart. The one thing that prevents their split becoming a perfect time reversal of our coupling is the very loss of it—that my parents made it out alive. They lived after I was born, but the cell that split apart did not so much die as cease to exist—her funeral her very two children. After she gave us sex, what did we have left to do? The microbe says *nothing* and turns to nothing the unity of nothing. They made it up but didn't know it.

But what of us? yes...the care the child needs. The man can get out of it. She could eat him alive, persist in that oneness they felt that instant, that *I could die this very moment*...you know it, don't you? I've heard that so many times before, in so many bedrooms—in my parents.

It's dangerous to see your father's sperm...you could be sucked back in again. It should have all collapsed at his very

rut—it was only a speck that fused with her, so why not let her take what wrecks her womb?

But the mother must survive. With each birth, the cord is only cut as the milk dries, drop by drop, and she becomes my witness. The pain and the coming out was only physical
Only symbolic. She's still the limits and womb of the child before adulthood, and only the tightest of wombs can make a child explode.

I said it was dangerous to see your father's sperm, but could you imagine an egg in her returning, revenging and putting itself in her—inside another of her eggs? A mother beast would take it wordlessly—after all, she eats her own shit. Same, a father knocking up his daughter the way a lion licks the dropped doe after eating the gazelle...

What animals do with their mouths
We sometimes mimic with our genitals

But soon as one grips and is gripped, the vision darkens. One feels but cannot see the hands any more. The friction, warm but unpleasant with the coming far in sight and the dawn, all too near. Finally, a pained spasm sets one awake as they grip their genitals to prevent too much rolling down
Searing through an untouched shaft, unprepared to give
And give. Take what you're given and wait for next time. The rains will come—who knows when, or even if you'll seize it.

Cats endure thorns to get impregnated.

6.

The fire below, the stars above
And all the darkness in between.

Down here, I burned for you
And sacrificed the strange beasts

I thought you'd like. Sang songs
Stupid songs they taught me. And there

Above, the only noise was the unending

7.

The fire's almost out. I can see its afterimage flee, but the stars still glisten with stars. I close my eyes and see their light. Then, I press them with my palms--and still see the light. All it did was ask: *could there be a pure darkness when I'm awake? does seeing it make the other senses blind--*

Can I meet true darkness without letting it inside me?

A friend once told me of a long sleep where all dreams, all scenarios are played out to keep you from that darkness. The dreams keep playing out until they start merging then repeating until finally, they admit there is no end and finally allow you to stare without distraction at the absolute d

8.

Have I been alone all this time—were they just echoes? In my lapse, the outer world froze. My words were sent out to resonate upon some chance encounter. If that happened, my world would double.

I took an apple and whispered my thoughts. The apples linked to their siblings on a tree and thrown over the globe could maybe send my message through distances and chance. Of all the people holding an apple right now, I imagined a small small chance of them hearing my voice through the apple's lens—responding to it, past all my expectations. Most would reject my words, but it was better than picking a random stranger, because I knew that the one on the other end at least liked apples.

9.

The apple blushed when I saw its method of creation. I saw the hole the bee put its head into and the finger laced with pollen. Then north, its stem—the nutrients, pumped to where the dust gathered, spiders made their homes. I saw two holes, as far apart as they could be, and tread the middle ground between the axial ruin. That shining surface and my face...by its red skin and pale flesh, I saw myself inverted—looking up at my reflection from the bottom of a lake.

The apples I ate never saw that mirror. Since then, how many of them have populated me—born in me, traversed through my guts and split in me, their bodies going down and nutrients above? How many have come and gone unsaved? I saw their remains mixed with all the dead things and realized that I was the apple, looking down at its shed body—that I was the paradise the souls of apples sought.

I no longer felt guilt, eating live things. Because in them I saw desires like my own. This was my sacrifice: as the one who eats, I have to go on living. Have I cleared myself enough?

Animals that I could swallow whole intrigued me the most. Insects, little crabs...things small enough to fit in your mouth. When do they die within me? I don't see them dying, but feel them with my inner being. They're not nutritious as a portion of a beast, but there's a purity in them...When I swallow them I capture their whole life, regardless of how small that whole is. I capture all the life that steams out from their orifices and any life that may have seeped into the ground. For all to be accepted, vices virtues all...

The teeth don't mash
Saliva helps it down
And with our breaths one
We die with our last growl

I'll take you back in. You've waited for this too long—but now, it's yours again. Don't worry about what thing I am—as long as I bear life, you have nothing to fear...

So it would say to me. If I could find such an elegant beast, I would plunge into its stomach and graft myself onto its lineage—and let my body die in an attempt to reach life.

10.

No one needed to love for me to love I find myself
alone but loved by it but nonetheless alone. Why
Do they react to me, why this great show
observing me? There were no sets, no stage
but still a show, still food to sustain us and soon a show
out the door. I have slept in my shadow
long enough, have loved many things and their many
many shadows and I know when the dreamer
wakes, even he will be gone.

11.

The fig held me with its thousand hands, thousand eyes and feet. The world that never needed me...the limbs all chased towards the center, not knowing they'd be plunged into a new place. When we look up, does the path that we trace upwards end at only one point of space? We've all seen that point.

The fig, too, received a point of light from the bottom source of its creation. Most of its limbs were in the darkness, though. I looked down at it, then up. Both big and small looked lonely to me.

Loneliness will either mold my thorns to something pretty, or I will break upon each person that I brush against. Instead of one weight, loneliness will be the fulcrum on which I weigh all else, soon to break itself and wreck.

12.

A deer has three sides: it couldn't have been on its back when I laid on it. I pressed on the doe's white spots like foam on the shore, knowing that beneath there lay the same smooth flesh—that it could touch mine. At that moment, I forgot who I was. I couldn't see my reflection in the deer's eyes, those eyes that undressed me.

We could not hear ourselves; our movements were lost in the rustling leaves. There was moistness that reflected green light on both our bodies. I dreamed of my seed finding itself in a new world, a world that it abandoned long ago, so acclimated to a human womb... here was an egg that would never accept them in, here an alien shore—but weren't they the ones who rejected this place? long ago. Now, it's their turn to die by their choice, deprived of the universal milk as mammals reject humanity in kind.

Among the art between the animals and men came the ones depicting transformation—shifting in the spectra. Another that showed the reincarnation. And finally, ones that showed the breeding between the two. All to show the ancient dream of transcendence.

Primal man sees animals that breed—sees his own community that breeds and breeds, imagines he could breed with that fox if only he were fast enough to catch it live, evade its bites as it nears him...or a

The ones domesticated don't count. They're too weak for human seed.

I saw them playing by the river. A small patch of students, glimmering by their skin. Another movement and I squinted: someone waved at me! Who was I to her? She loved each passing stranger...who knew there was a way to get under the bridge? Down to the river. I searched and searched

She'd shown me there was a way...yes, it was the small gap between the bridge and road—a gap I never noticed. To the left of the students was a daughter and her parents playing in the river. I moved closer to the shirtless students and admired how they draped their green towels over the mossy rocks, balancing their glass bottles between them.

I took my glasses off—none of them wore glasses!—and my shirt, hoping that her wave could develop into some inclusion—friendship with the gang. The family to the left played in the falls as the most swollen of the students took a swig of tequila and, as if the rocks were a dock, built momentum as he hopped among the rocks and hurled himself into the river's center.

Wednesday, I was happy—to discover a new area below the bridge, and all thanks to a stranger! To be one among men! This was the world I wanted...I took pictures of the man mid-jump into the water. The students looked at me; I looked away and soon, I was closing my eyes and imagining them as wolves

(I never look back on those photos because they prove that they were not all wolves.)

There were ten or so pictures I took back with me, three times that student jumped into the river—sometimes a backflip, other times a ball. They applied lotion over their brown skin, and I couldn't believe they cared...I almost left then. But I chose to stay. I still remember the wind over the leaves and olive light over their bodies when I heard *could you move a little that way?* His voice was loose—a student in the gang neared me—our chests faced each other. He gestured to the right with an arm blown in the wind. I smiled, lowered my head to face the rocks and moved about a frog's leap—thinking he wanted to sit where I was. I was settling down when another *Further!* came in his direction, and I moved a few rocks more until I was closer to the family than the students. And gradually it occurred to me that he was getting rid of me; that I was the wolf, and he the sheepdog guarding all the flock.

I could no longer look back at them. Each time I sat, thinking him satisfied, I heard that same *Further!* and got up to move again. While I was moving between rocks, the family asked *Hello, what time is it?* Unaware of my relation with the students—of my status of the wolf to them. I said 5:18 and they thanked me as any other passerby and I caught their

thanks! Mixed with the student's *further!*.

If they'd known that a week ago I met with others cooler than them--and talked to them as equals! they certainly wouldn't have thought me strange as they did then. If they'd seen me somewhere other than the river..

Eventually, I reached the last step of the stairway. I turned back to the students for the first time since that man came to me. The girl who once waved at me had an expression that even now burns me when I try to think of what she thought then. I stared at the boy whose chest was once so close to mine and

Why are you looking at me?

and nodded and smiled at him, ready for my departure. All I saw was the river flowing like the locks of hair on his chest.

When I came back home, I ate the rice from the fridge without reheating it.

Yesterday, I reclined when the sunlight from the window rose just enough to lay on the bed and spread itself out. During that time, I locked the door and sat naked, looking at the valley made between my pelvis. It was my conceit that I was a bare animal resting, even fornicating in the sun. Someone was on me, their hair lit by the dusk when I saw my flared reflection. They took from me the berries I'd stolen from the forest and the oil that went half on my mouth, half on skin. I ate the mango as if it were a heart, the berries as if heads, filled with the idea that what I ate instantly turned into my seed—that its whiteness was natural rather than something to hide, purer than piss and something to treasure—to take in once again. The small leaks frothing between the skin and tip tasted like the thickest top of a whitecap, full of the algal hints I knew. The black, curling hairs washed up upon the tanned shore, picked at by little flies..

Each fruit I'd hold up to the sun. Its wound would always show brightest. I would eat the trapped light, possessing it an instant—letting it become me, rather than digestion and waste.. I liked my stomach full and bowels empty.

The chaos of the pubic hairs, when light ran down them seemed like the spirals into darkness, loaded with a salt iridescent breeze—maybe with a touch of green. I could grab my skin and expect fistfuls of sand. My own horizon, seaweed on the moistened sand and on the shadow's edge
There, you could see the red in sand.

People never tried the locked door. They didn't even notice the door was closed...but every time I heard footsteps, I would grab my pants. Eventually, the dusk got off the bed and floated on my torso. If I could just align myself with the sun's rays, I might be able to see the light receding--no I couldn't tell the difference between that and the ebbing of my chest and before I knew it, the sun was already low and as I stared at it, it began to cast a shadow on itself.

15.

To hear the voice of a man whose parents spoke english to them and english only is like water...no bubbles, no matter how little words they know they always say the right thing with confidence. And me...no matter how many words I speak I must be a fox—all in understanding, unprepared to speak like a stutterer's lapse of time between reality and me, unable to find not just the correct thing to say but the righteous. What could I say—should? Yet

Wasn't this the distance from the casual that made me truly aware of all the fragments of speech flowing past me like the dust of dancers? The wonder is that these natives don't even know their fluidity and go about their dialogues like two birds with their interlocking rituals. My consolation is that, beyond the two birds, the one who enjoys it most is the one who sees them from afar.

My reticence was soon mistaken for a lack of speech. I was sent to some den apart from the normal students where the kids resembled animals more than men. In this bestiary I was in a sense freed from the normal school routine yet trapped by utter boredom. We were to ask questions to the ~~keeper~~-*chaperone* and reply to ones he asked us...this was our prescribed conversation. I don't remember his questions nor my answers...only some of what I asked, some of what he answered.

Q: What do you wish for most?

...f I had just one wish I wish that people would just get along--that people would view each other as their own--regardless of their color, size...species?

Q: What's the meaning of...?

...ll find this out when you get older...for you, for everyone. it's what you make of it...

Perhaps he thought I made light of his answers because he began to develop some shyness at giving me the answers. I never mean my silence like a wolf's, no--

If I speak in silences and mumbles, it's because I want you all to come closer. But my chaperone? He turned himself in...I always thought of him as the one outside the cage. But now, I felt like a fox who looked out her cage towards the man and thought herself on the other side to cope with her imprisonment *and the man believed her.*

But soon the fox grows bored of this illusion as well and

well, loving only the back and forth of power, lends it back with a question that could shatter the man's cage, re-erect her own, telling him she's not all that:

Q: Who am I to you?

You? Why, you're [REDACTED]

Q: That's not my name.

It's not [REDACTED]?

[REDACTED] was the name of another fox. Possibly much more bestial than me, though I lack none of it. Soon, they found that I wasn't some fox that required training but a domestic fox, cultured from the womb on. It's an easy mistake to make. For anyone to make, really. After all, does anyone assume a soul in these eyes? Or even anything beyond a bestial calculation through my dark coat? When I see my friends, I see in them the soul that should have been endowed upon me. A fragment of myself in you all. I love you.

As I was chopping onions, I remembered that my friends have bodies, too. If I made one more chop, would that make them happy? I can't believe the chain of objects that connect us—I want to touch the earth to feel their steps.

There is some feeling about meeting someone online, knowing everything about them except their appearance and voice. Your mind is matching the body to their words and creations. You imagine that voice filling each of their written sentences, their hand—which one?—illustrating each work. The cover of the book is what you see after reading all its contents, the heart of their anonymous confessions, and only after a long period of swimming upwards do we see the surface of the ice so glossily wrapped over the dark sea.

Could I imagine
An online friend that eats?
Living with others you never

knew existed—did I know
They had a mom & dad? that they
were once just kids?

Silencing the wires helped me see
the bodies—earthen, rich
yet so much more invisible.

The fact that we all exist in the same world is strange. That the beautiful and the ugly exist in the same realm is dangerous. We have always seen the ugly raping the beautiful. That's how smart we've gotten about it. A steel ball may pierce through and end a life unceremoniously, and a single stroke may destroy a masterpiece; these things are happening as we speak. The beauty isn't fled, just eaten by the ugly. But the beautiful destroying beauty? That's something we'd cry about--would actually come to see. Two fragile things colliding, where each thrust at the other is a thrust at themselves. Two beauties, placed together and destroyed by their proliferation...all possible yet rare.

17.

...is the self found in the passionate bursts of
knowing what to do, or in the day-to-day
enigma? in those wild and separated peaks
could we find them like the points that trace
Around a center—or are they merely errors?

If the circle's the truer resonance, then
we can only show ourselves with
the one way to fully press those peaks
into something even said.

18.

I must imagine every plant taking up the sun's beams
As a child picks its fruit at body-temperature.
I must imagine every gosling's down
loosing, the sudden drops of their calls
caressing water's slow ascent to the swelling fruits.

If I can ride this cycle, I will have purified myself
By the time I return to this form.
Seeing everyone's desire makes me lose my own.

If I could do this without anyone knowing
Then what joys and horrors could I imagine
All my friends are going through in their own
Corners of the world. How
When I am completely engrossed in chatter
My most distant relative could be taking in
Sunlight.

19.

I shouted in the wind—and heard an echo back. Because I had faith in the echo, I had no fear of abandonment and wrote honestly. It was a diary that only after the smoke rose from the pages did I realize that I was writing to an actual person.

At night, I imagine the mailbox as some ritual fire where the slot to put my letter gapes at me and licks my hand as I put the letter in. I shut out all thoughts of her response, drop it in the flames, the beast's mouth.

There are reasons why I'm so much more emotional in a letter than a text. First, the impact of exposure is delayed. One writes privately the whole block instead of a chain where everyone can see your progress. Second, there is impermanence—at least, the illusion of it. I can't see exactly what I wrote, just as I can't see where it's sent. It is a memory to the writer as it is reality for the recipient.

We put our letters in the slot like the mud holes our ancestors dug to hide their secrets. We walk away from the place of pollution as if the secret would stay there—or, we see a messenger carry off the secret to the horizon as if they'd carry them off to nowhere. But they come back from nowhere. Come back with responses. After all, nowhere is a poet.

20.

If I love someone's words and images, do I love the creator? A long time ago, I thought of her as someone I could touch. And I made full use of that when going to bed alone and waking up half-submerged in dreams. But I cannot pretend anymore. All these idols of what I have seen already--do I know what she looks like? When she typed to me, she had a personality. And when she wrote to me, a distinct hand. She lives on the other side of the country--other corner, in fact. It's as cold there as it is hot here. She says she'll die before I even find love. What's that all about? She dropped out of middle school the same year I graduated from college-- does that mean she's all the more mature?

She hates intellectuals and the well-off and the debased *but loves me.*

She makes me wait for the next two days--makes me wonder what life in two months will be like. I feel like I could fall deeper and deeper *and still be picked up.* She's just words and images--but *how* can that purity house such dirt and blood? And how can words and images claim to hide even dirtier words, even bloodier artworks? She's lost so much...apart from three other things, that's all she has. I told her I'd like to see them all one day. I won't let her die before me. And when I do, I certainly Will burn these words. After all, she does love me. I've told her once a story about herself, and I'm not sure she knows that the stories I tell are so personal that I can't share them with anyone other than the very subjects of the story. I think she'll understand--no, I'm sure she'll love it.

21.

I found in her a beast that stands on the same ground she urinates on, a dog who didn't believe in a heaven for all dogs... we broke from man together. We stared at each other, trying to see what strange things men saw in us— Stared hard as we could—and succeeded in locating each other's heart. We tried on the clothes given to us, certain that the fact we looked no different meant that we were of the same breed.

That assumption was a mistake.

22.

I did not delete my invitation, though with certainty she saw and tacitly rejected it. I chose to keep it where both of us could see...it would act as a monument to my loneliness, my mission in this world. I wondered When she would respond after that. Her reply would be a warning to go no further.

Far away your real self stands in a room far away, taking in my messages the very second they're sent. You pay no heed to it. I think that's what's going on. And when I raise my head, there's another you in my room, who responds to my worst suspicions with *yes I meant that*. Otherwise there's no explanation, no excuse until you come back...an instant message

Gives me instant feelings! To wake up expecting a reply and getting none—an absolute day-killer! I need to silence all the wires telling me there's silence. When I break my vow, reconnect the wires and check back, still no reply! My darkness deepens.

23.

If I close my eyes, I can see people having the best time of their lives. I squint further and see that they're my friends who've left. All in the span of my eyes, smiling and smiling. The ones who were sad when we parted have grown happy the ones who were happy, even happier.

I see this only when I'm alone. They are filling each other's cups and eating. Some of these people are certainly unhappy right now, if I recall their circumstances—
unhappier than I am, even. But that doesn't change what I see when I close my eyes. They are singing now. Let me come closer. After all, I AM the main course. They thought me dead, but here I am. They are now choking, choking
With laughter. Would I could show you all this as it's happening. Perhaps you're even there right now.

24.

A wellspring of blood
Charges your veins and forms
The beginning middle
Of the unending syllable

But when that wave
crashes, so soon does it withdraw
That hands will cover the ears
For sound instead of silence

So soon are we left coveting
An eyelid's special darkness
That shows the brightest things
Dreams, quickly fading burns. That

Is what blood affords us
Subtler than nothing
The integral sights that
compose our nothing

And a curtain
That we know's a curtain
Are happy it's a curtain
Until we take it as a wall.

To channel death on us—on ourselves and others—is like channeling life in getting children. God gave us gifts to use with respect; if he did not give us sex, then he did not give us swords. To use them flippantly is bad, but so is abstinence. Just as life through sex is an imperfect, blurred facsimile of

god's powers, so too is death through violence. It is the wrapping with which this gift is sealed as well as the last crumb. The ones who cling to life are the ones who have the least—god gave us the discretion to know, and the epiphanies to see a proper time and place to end. To go any further is to dwell.

25.

..not from an urge to escape, not on a whim, but with a sure foot and destination. And the entrance? Fire and water are more than worthy gates, bringing fear to the ones who only wish for an escape. On the day I choose, I'll most likely be accompanied by a train of people seeking closure. But my entrance out of all will be the most spectacular.

I think in one hundred years there'll still be men like me
I think in two hundred years there'll still be men like me
But I know in three hundred years
there won't be any more like me.

I told myself that I would either enlist or run far into the forest or—failing both these things—kill myself. A simple goal of survival: subjugation to the world. To join the world—and never let it turn to art. A beast without war is a beast without a forest. The green and red, both signs of life. But the greatest one was red.

Because of my fitness, the first two options closed the last. Because of my weakness, I was deemed unfit for service. And so, with moderately strong legs, I fled into the forest. Here was no love. I saw those lush landscapes between the barren path, but never imagined how hard and steep it would be to walk in them. Do the painters understand?

Do not lie and make yourself known
Do not confess and make yourself unknown.
Do not hide and kill the fox
Do not show up and let the fox escape.

Do not attack and make yourself known
Do not defend and make yourself known.
Do not give seed and kill your only son
Do not take seed and kill your only son.

26.

Where suicide is shunned, people
dissipate their wills to die in different ways
There's one who drives with slightly less care
and presses on the pedal half asleep
Trusting in the dark. Another hurls their body
on everyone they meet, dreads the day
when someone throws back
yet strangely never stops. The drive
Dissipates through other ways.
And all prevention turns the choice into a sea
of possibilities, as if one finds the flower-shop
closed
And walks into a field, hoping for the poppies.

11/18

I always cry & think of killing myself for the stupidest reasons. Always
the stupidest reasons because the real ones bring me to stillness and
silence...but the crying is everything.

27.

When I got her letter, I could hardly wait for the introduction.

Each word described itself as it was written--introduced itself. She told me once that she searched for a pen for ten minutes; I told her of the noisy couple next to me. We both found it comforting to believe there was a body behind the words. I read it and read and at the end of it knew that she felt the same way--perhaps earlier than I'd thought, though much later than when my own came about.

I hardly got off the end of her last page before I started writing my first. In ten pages I told her of my feelings, how they grew or festered--how they burrowed to my core and became me. Once it's a motif in dreams there's hardly any hope of freedom. I dreamed her as much as myself.

I sealed it in an envelope before the taste of her past dismissals set in. Those ones. Her comments on my art—her lack of them. I set the envelope aside and, with a hand much slower cooler than the first, began a second. I wrote how the hints she caught onto were all from a love divorced from romance. I asked her—warned her off. I told her to admire the wintry green pines and remember the barren cherry branches—that she was making herself vulnerable for nothing.

The second was less than a page. Each sentence could've spanned a line. I sealed it in a separate envelope and stacked it on the first. They looked identical. In the evening, I took them both to be delivered. the blue box gaped and whistled in the wind and trembled from the footsteps. I almost looked into it. Was she there inside

shaking? I took the two envelopes and asked the blue box which envelope was tastier. It just shook. After bending to its mouth, I stood up straight, placed one on each palm and shook and judged. Then, I slid one in the slot and sighed the way home.

Nothing looked the same at home. My house felt strangely connected to her shanty on opposite sides of the world as if I could travel all those miles by opening my bedroom door and see her sleeping and slowly close it back to avoid waking her. It should be night for her right now...until now, I've never thought about when she was awake. By then I'm sleeping—and always treated with a text on waking as if she, too, came here from that portal, took my letter and placed her own under my pillow.