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## Afterparty

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# afterparty

poems  
by  
patrick werle



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V. *i find myself resenting the freedom to play*

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3. when dust settles on the years we sleep back to back
4. we stack ourselves in dreams like stones in a Robert Frost wall
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8. i listen to children playing at the daycare next door
9. sleep study while lying awake at 4am
10. poem from a late night in Madrid
11. upstairs Zaeva is pooling her resources
12. something beautiful

VI. assorted notes and stuff like that....

# Patrick Michael Werle

## Artist Statement

*who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty incantations which in the yellow morning were stanzas of gibberish,*  
- Ginsberg from *Howl*

I find myself in a state of almost constant inspiration: words I hear, phrases uttered, a tattoo on a stranger, a child in a stroller, a strong reaction, an injustice, a shit job, a memory, a sexual encounter, a stolen line. My poetry comes from whatever is around me at any given time.

*Our grandmothers hold babies on their laps  
posing for posterity  
in a country diseased and dying  
from casinos and ranches and Cracker Barrel bone chokings.*

Patrick Michael Werle

I am always lost in ideas. I want to find answers. I am never satisfied. I am challenged by dogma and rules. I think poems are free and language is free. I believe poems and a poetry matter today.

I came to poetry through Shel Silverstein. I came to poetry through music. I came to poetry listening to AM radio, The Doors, the Velvet Underground, CCR, punk rock, and other noise. Patti Smith, Jim Morrison, and Jim Carroll were influential and they, in turn, led me to the Beats and the NY Poets. I discovered the Outlaw/Underground poets. I found the strange and raw poets of the small press...those outside of the Academy and the intellectual constructs. I found poets who burned, not for awards or prizes, but because they simply needed to scream.

*I turned silences and nights into words. What was unutterable, I wrote down. I made the whirling world stand still.*

— Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell/The Drunken Boat*

I remember reading *A Season in Hell* by Rimbaud at fourteen years old and being fascinated with the raw, erotic, language of this voice. I understood little of what Rimbaud was saying, but I loved the words. I still don't understand much of Rimbaud's work.

I walked away from writing for many years; I just stopped, somewhere in my early-mid twenties. At the place where most writers are forming a voice, graduating, publishing, I stopped. I would jot an

idea down here or there in a notebook, though I refused to be a poet. I was frustrated. I rebelled. I stopped. Maybe I really just had nothing to say for a number of years.

*An intellectual says a simple thing in a hard way. An artist says a hard thing in simple way.*

— Charles Bukowski

Seven years ago, by some strange, internal need, I came back to poetry. I consider myself an insatiable reader and obsessive writer. I feel as if I am always playing catch-up. I get my hands on, and my brain around, everything I can find. The NY Poets, the Dadaists and French Avant Garde, the Language Poets, the American Avant Garde, the Hipster poets, Free-Verse, and Confessional. My influence is broad, diverse, and, more than a bit, idiosyncratic. My poetry reflects influences of the Twentieth and Twenty-First century post-modern poetry above all else. I am an American poet.

I like to play with nonsense at times. I like the way words sound and the images that can be conjured in building with words and not-sensical statements. I also write a variety of standard free-verse, as well. I try to be honest to the muse. I tend to use simple language. I write how I speak and my poems, I feel, sound like me. When I sit to write, I tend to let words flow and build. I like letting the poems almost write themselves. I don't sit with an idea and say, "I am going to write about...." and, thus, the revision process is challenging. I write and then I feel done. I am constantly learning and growing. I am not afraid to take risks and make mistakes. I have 100's of poems that are seeds, waiting to take root somewhere, at some point.....maybe.

*Hell no, I ain't happy.*

--- Patterson Hood of The Drive-By Truckers

Music was my gateway drug to poetry and I am still able to find the vast majority of my inspiration in music and musical forms. Free-Jazz to Punk Rock to Memphis Soul to Black Metal and everything in between, is inspiration for me. Music is a large part of my work and continues to find a way into my poetry. While other poets also continue to spark my work, music is the biggest influence and the thing that can get me writing.

## Afterparty

poems by Patrick Werle

As I reflect on the poems in this collection, I am lost on the best way to describe the work contained within. I am not the person to talk about my work, perhaps because it's mine and I am close. I struggle with digging into the meanings and the themes of my poems. I like to believe they can speak for themselves. One of my goals as a poet is to create work that anyone can read and maybe find something in themselves within the poems. If not, they can at best appreciate or reject the work and understand why. The collection is built on poems that I have, for the most part, begun and ended over the last five years or so. While some have their foundations rooted in lines written years ago, each has fully evolved into themselves in the last year.

My ideal is to have this collection read as if on a timeline; each section as a collection of moments during different parts of my life. While often reading as autobiographical, this is not necessarily the case. While much of my life and my experience is collected in the work, I do not want to be seen as an autobiographical or confessional poet. I want to answer the questions around the stories and characters with a solid, "Maybe?".

*Afterparty* is built on the question, "Can one overcome the past?"...I think. While the work flows on a loose timeline, I do not intend the manuscript to be a story. As the poems drift in and out of time periods; childhood, adolescence, fatherhood, I hope that this is also a collection that can be opened in the middle or paged through and still be successful. Of course, as the artist, I would love for



people to take the journey beginning to end. And I also believe that poetry collections should be able to have a reader jump in at any point to begin. I am hopeful that I have accomplished both.

The titles for the poems read almost as lines in much of my work. Often a poem starts with the title and I build from there based on whatever comes to me. At other times, I will find the title as I am writing the poem. It may come to me as a line that just won't work in the poem, but I still feel it is important to the piece, so a title is born. I always appreciated how the poet, Ruth Stone, talked of poems coming to her. In an interview with Elizabeth Gilbert,

*“As [Stone] was growing up in rural Virginia, she would be out, working in the fields and she would feel and hear a poem coming at her from over the landscape. It was like a thunderous train of air and it would come barreling down at her over the landscape. And when she felt it coming...cause it would shake the earth under her feet, she knew she had only one thing to do at that point. That was to, in her words, “run like hell” to the house as she would be chased by this poem. The whole deal was that she had to get to a piece of paper fast enough so that when it thundered through her, she could collect it and grab it on the page. Other times she wouldn't be fast enough, so she would be running and running, and she wouldn't get to the house, and the poem would barrel through her and she would miss it, and it would “continue on across the landscape looking for another poet.”*

I enjoy the idea of running like hell, literally and figuratively, to catch the poem before it's gone. The challenge of this is that I can take long periods of time in crafting new work. At one time I really struggled with this, and through my Graduate work, have made peace with this being an important part of my process. I am a poet that needs to build over time and I am okay with that. As a carpenter and musician, my creativity never sits idle for any period of time. Respect for the muse is essential to me.

My hope with this collection is that someday, someone, will read these poems and find a little bit of themselves in the work. I know that seems trite and predictable, but that is my purpose in this work. Just one person finding something in my work that resonates; maybe sparks something for them to try like hell to make this world just a little bit better through something they decide to do.



## **born (Miller Hospital)**

i was born in a blizzard in a hospital where my grandpa had his back cut open where my grandpa had his ankle cut open where i was born a hospital became a school became a college a hospital that grew closed became a bigger school a college not a hospital for anyone anymore on a hill the hospital in a city with a river running through it the hospital on a hill that overlooked the city from the time i was born in a blizzard and years before i was born there after a car ride through the blizzard where a truck cut the path through the snow to get me to the hospital where i was born that became a school in the city above the river the city with the river rolling through it and i have scars from that city and they don't show as much as they used to because i am older now and i was born and nobody held me when i was born i was born sick i was not touched by human arms for ten days and my mother was sick and i was alone with strangers in masks and gloves alone where i often am today in this city and the country and everywhere and my grandpa had scars from this city too and he was alone and his scars are ashes now ashes in an urn with my grandma who was his wife who is ash now too ash that we will bury someday soon we all say we will bury the ashes when the weather gets warm and the weather has been warm in this city over the past two years and like scars i think we won't let them go and my grandparents bodies of ash stay in an urn on a shelf in a cabinet until we can put them in the ground and live on and you maybe my eyes gloss over sometimes and i am not afraid to let go and i could be maybe i should be and i make peace with my deaths i do not carry guilt or ghosts as i was born in that blizzard and born in that hospital that became that school on the hill in the city with the river scarring through it and today my grandpa is dead and turned to ash and my grandma is dead and turned to ash and the school sits on the hill today bigger and brighter than before and the weather is sunshine and bright and warm and i still cry on some days and i still miss them and i really don't remember the blizzard or the hospital or the people who did not touch me or those who held me with gloves and with masks i am still always scarred by this city like the river runs through a scar on this city

my mother opened the car door handed me a dream and pushed

**miranda rights sometime in 1972**

a story claws its way from a scar deep inside rolls off of my tongue down my chin comes to rest between my heart my lungs it's Saturday night in our house & i am falling apart as a man falling apart as a boy my heart my lungs my small body trapped in a bathroom stall off white paint poisons the metal frame he is there a man he is there holding me he is a policeman off duty a family friend holding me there in the stall i see a flash of holstered ankle gun cheap brown Florsheim Shoes polyester slacks the smell of plastic animals in the Mold-A-Rama haunting me 40 years later the unspoken threat of what would come if i refused my right to remain silent

## **a day in the life of another hard luck story**

a six year old from the neighborhood is the first to find me.  
i was dropped here when i ran out of innocence.

my mother opened the car door, handed me a dream, and pushed.

i laugh as i tumble, skinning my skull my knees my childhood  
on grainy black asphalt.

i am laughing in the dirty, twisted face of some nameless child,  
standing over me drooling and staring.

i am picking rocks from my palms from my kneecaps.  
he raises his own swollen left hand to show me his dream,

the one his mother gave him when he was pushed.  
i am unimpressed by this vacant young smile,

and i am now six years old.

i take a bite of the sidewalk, grab a pile of leaves  
for good measure, curse the bruised history of people in their garages  
watching as i chew the story of my life.

the dirty child grins from ear to eye, hikes up his pants,  
and turns to oil.

i become another child, drifting off into child-memory of jumping sharks,  
ape-shall-not-kill-ape TV shows, concussions, whispered curses,

i hear singing.

Rosie Grier is on a rock near the sea, holding the oil-boy in his broken fist,  
singing, *it's alright to cry* and i cry, too.

i cry because my father ate turpentine, killing a dream.  
i cry because my mother preferred another life.

i cry because a fat neighbor boy turned me inside out in the spring  
to the winter to the summer and back again.

i cry because my houses were not homes when I wandered too far into the bushes  
coming out alone, scarred.

a six year old from the neighborhood is the first to find me.  
he coughs cancerous, dusted, consumed.

his left hand, still swollen, opens.  
i take a piece of his dream into my mouth and roll it across my tongue,

against the back of my teeth, tasting the only thing left in the cracked foundation of my mind.  
i smiled eight to eight overture,

he began to shuffle a slow gaze narcotic waltz.

***one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three***

i kissed his oil head as he spun, dipped, whirled away, taking my dream, my foundation, my mother  
to the bushes, to my scars, and back again.



## **rain**

the light this morning is broken clouds roll in a calm precedes the coming violence in all that nature has to offer as the sky splits opens releasing the weight of water i run my hand along the window questioning my own reflection

**we are all we need when they come for us**

a cigarette burns in an ashtray  
as a fading moment shadows one lone hazy  
motel room where a bathroom mirror reflects  
interstate glow through a curtain on North Platte, Nebraska

i remember well the feeling falling out of fashion  
slipping late dazed forward into smeared lipstick  
greasy reminders of rented collars formal wear wedding days

i remember rolling through alleys hoodwinked  
subtle serial fantasy the number repeating rhythm  
a mind lost in hiding a number over again  
anonymous legal notice taped to painted door  
through night waves of the 4 a.m television flicker

drug knees bleach stained bumper toes wound  
through the holes in schooldays one unplugged  
drone fix resented humming power  
lines scraping the landscape outside of the garage  
where a mother finds a son to lose a son  
to a neighborhood stranger

kicking the heartache of soft-middle age writing  
loneliness in palmed dripping fists with stick-pins  
and india-ink isolated small cuts to thighs the collapse  
of vanity ribboned medals of honor left on a headstone

## **a skeleton opens the curtain**

for years I don't tell anyone a complete story I let the memory sit in my chest to slowly eat its way into my sexuality sliding my life into a black leather glove fist balled in striking distance I am once wasted and curbside striking the pose of an unbeliever the heretic too far away from anybody who could ever love me as tail lights fade into the silent glimpse of commemorative crosses at the curve I sit in the diner I feel everyone stare a TV flashes quickly a horror on the edge of the highway I should mourn or maybe do something different I don't feel any better telling you this

## **poem about the scars on my forehead**

i was bit by a dog in the face at four years old  
a yellow lab not usually a fierce creature

but this day was different

i had climbed into her house  
i had taken her toy  
i was a threat to her she fought back

defending her house defending her toy

i still have scars  
i am not afraid of dogs never have been  
i understood sometimes you have to fight for what's yours and  
sometimes you lose

## **a backwards glance at the bicentennial summer**

I.

*Aurora, Minnesota. Iron Range.*

I smell gasoline burning. I hear the rasping roar of big bikes.  
Straight Pipes. American Iron.

The BPM MC. Beer. Pussy. Motorcycles.  
Big Louie. Jimmy. Julie.  
The guy who rode his bike into the lake.  
The woman who screamed about the world ending soon.  
High on bathtub yellow-crank and cheap beer.

Others forgotten in the shadow of denim, weathered black leathers etched across the asphalt.  
Tattoos and beards.

Tough men and tougher women, fueled by nicotine, white crosses, alcohol, a desire to burn the  
world. Colors fly on backs. Rockers display the clubhouse they call home.

Home to the death.

II.

*Rudy's Bar on the 4th of July. Aurora, Minnesota. Iron Range. North*

People spill out onto the street. People come home. People dance, drink, remember.

In my child hand, quarters. One dollar. Three dollars. Five dollars. Jamming pockets as they come.

Sneaking sips from brown bottles when the time is right. Nobody is looking. The beer is warm, safe  
as it slides through me. I am warm, safe sliding through me.

I can barely reach the pinball machine. Lights flash. Clang, Click. Clank. Ding Ding Ding!

A boy who is my brother for the time with me. Together we navigate. I am the one who steals beer.  
Steals more quarters. Steals. I am the one who will always steal. The years never change this.

III.

*A parade. July 4th. Aurora, Minnesota. Iron Range. North*

A shiny silver dollar placed in my hand. A parade. I am wearing a cardboard red costume, wrapped around me to look like a firecracker. The heat. I hate this stupid costume. Boom! Bang! Glittered letters on the front. A wire band with red/white/blue streamers tied to the top. The idea of a fuse for this stupid costume.

It's hot. Firecracker hot. I taste silver on my tongue. A silver of insanity. The first of many days hating where I am and where I come from. The cardboard pinches my arm pits. It's hot.

I feel the beer in my head. Light and tipping a bit to the right. Unsteady. My feet hurt because my shoes are too small.

IV.

*A sandcastle. Outside of Aurora, Minnesota. July 5th. Iron Range. North*

An all day construction project. Sand. Shovels. Sticks. Rocks. Brown-Iron waters. Hours and hours. It seemed. The details. Intricate. A world never ending. Trenches. Roads. Pathways. Mapped. Planned. Carefully executed. Designed. Arranged

Grandpa wakes. Drunk. As always. Nothing new to see.

Opening the cabin door. Stumbling with gout with drink. Screaming about his goddamn beach.

But.....beaches are for sandcastles.

I am wrong.

I rake the world I created back into the sand.

**night time slides a foot from under the sheets**

filtering through the hours  
i kick and wheeze against the heat

i curl into someone else's dream  
in an attempt to take something back

something i once considered lost  
found again slips through my fingers

## **blowing dust from empty brown bottles**

gray wind scratches the air coffee bitter hot fresh  
a whisper falls from my swollen tongue through  
the cracks in my teeth as dust settles in my throat  
knowing the children believed they could all be wrong  
where dry tears dampen dirty pillowcases as a Cuban horn  
blows waves on a soothing night waiting for an eclipse  
a death a smothering of ourselves with technology twisted  
enormous visions a morning after walk of shame  
in the light a son reaches for a quarter a medallion  
to St. Christopher while refusing to pass any blame  
for the outcome



we were all upside down flags of distress

**if you're lucky is a theory of a friend**

(for MM)

rubbing wary eyes scratching scraping the rusted undercarriage of machine simple language digging out a single slivered word from chaos root spinning feral rhythm to a three-chord epigraph echoing inside the line by line

a promise proposed in each broken stanza as a phrase-turned empties itself onto the pages of small town distractions birds psychedelic scars burned on each letter each word whispering trolling on the stale white tongue of trees and champagne grapes

jaywalking through the American Dream jaywalking through pages blank and restless jaywalking whistling carrot-flowers from the bottom of a pint glass drained quickly before last-call lights go up

the words wrapped in cigarette cellophane like acid tabs hidden in a Dead Kennedys record sleeve for another day when the sky opens itself to the world spilling from the words stretched across the book of prayer dog-eared distant on the coffee table

## **where the kids are setting up a free speed nation**

when it comes down to who is it when it comes down back on up back again who is it falling headlong into a teenage riot wild amps beyond ten scratching the surface staged raged underaged loud guitars clang trill chaos simple chaos bleeding fingers J. Mascis for President screamed over thumping kick drum down the fretboard as teeth grind in further anticipation of crowds parting Red Sea like to deliver another vacant promised land driven from stages from sweat stained t-shirts Goodwill denim to dirty ashtrays spray painted walls bleach stains on our All-Stars black white black living dead somewhere in between trailing footprints on sticky club floors reaching for quarters for pinball or smokes falling into failing at the great expense of Chelsea Hotel legends in art school drop-outs grinding steel against the broken rules over and over and over knowing somewhere out there among the downs and back ups there was the wanting and nothing more than waiting for an imagined kool thing to save us all

## **remembering the mixtape hissing through a midnight**

to bend this empty bed into star crossed lovers to stained sheets to freak flags flying over Ikea dream homes to cry for dead fathers to live sacrificed in brown bottles card games pink slip losing bets among the whispered rumour of disease buried in the dusty boxes of family secrets to walk our grandfathers into the next room into the grave into some other side to leave them with simply nothing left to say to pull astral-waves from inside the back of your eyes sprinkle moon light on familiar headstones histories and ghost stories that burrow in the small of my back to laugh out loud in graveyards to set the spirits of the long forgotten free to dance and sing and drink and mourn for the living still trapped in delusion

to write a dim rented room onto the tongues of waxed waning lovers that never were that never will be written in books movies trendy graphic novels to raise to rise to capture the stories floating above you in dead-skin dust obscured by clouds by silk scarves by bowed hysteric brick walls of rent controlled daydreams to carve the history of us into my chest so when the wounds heal the remains another raised skin scar to forever remember the day you melted me into something other than another dog-eared collection of words a half-dead mixtape of the songs you whispered to me that night back in June

to lose the simple parts of a mind in your mad grotesque verses and to taste you after a jog through Central Park to imagine you at the drinking fountain in the public square your lips caressing water droplets on your chin cooling the August heat as you gaze into another version of you to burn your books so that only i can know the words you wrote so when you ask me to give you back those words you took from me and i took from you i will draw you a simple childish picture of one daydream and we'll call it even

## **the night David Bowie died**

not died in the way you and i will die  
died in a drift of stardust over New York  
over London Tokyo South America  
and the world if you look  
you'll see contrails of red green gold  
blue spinning with the stars if you listen  
you'll hear a whisper waiting in the sky

## **I dreamt your suicide note was scrawled in pencil on a brown paper bag**

I imagine you pacing dizzy panic, missing a favorite black pen, missing a notebook, faded yellowed pages, coffee stains tear stains blood stains over pages of the fine line composition style, you love so.

I imagine a final moment spent pacing the wood floor in your oldest brown slippers, shuffling frantically searching for notebook for pen, whisper cursing me between your teeth as, with little doubt, I put them somewhere.

I imagine you, second thought, the phone rings, you wonder if you should, you don't answer.

I imagine you thinking, would someone stop by, would the doorbell ring, as if anyone does that anymore..

I imagine you check your email, find only trash, spam empty, jumbled letters asking for things you no longer have the patience to give.

I imagine you in the kitchen as you stop for a drink, a chocolate chip cookie or two, a spoonful of peanut butter as you feel the lowered blood sugar.

I realize that in the drawer below the cutting boards you will find the paper bag, you will find the pencil knowing that would have to do.

**my favorite coup d'état**

(after Alex Lemon)

that quiet inside me  
whispers *it's time to shed a  
secret, time to break the seal.*

fingers of moonlight dance  
around the found rhythm.  
the city sways just outside the pocket.

midnight passes through  
& leaves without connecting  
a single dot. everyone

whispers to themselves  
*it's time.* while  
down by the river, the guilty shed skin

in continuous mystery. the secret on my tongue  
twists itself around a memory—  
whispering *i have been here all along.*

## 5 minutes on the death of Lou Reed

wild side transvestite satellite love  
kicked down blown in back alleys  
bathrooms barrooms metal machine music  
spun from urban myths heroin nods  
at the back of an adult theater  
Warhol fame Factory noise New York  
needle pricks desperation  
Bowie Pop Moe Tucker  
Nico Cale Berlin back to New York  
boys packed tight in blue jeans yearning  
aching caught between the rot of times square  
a lower east side backroom backseat of a cop car  
armed to lips to teeth with electric steel strings  
tight black curls bruised veins collapsed around black  
sunglasses quick vacant thousand yard stare  
hated feared drugged in these streets  
mauled by taxis    hustlers    mtv



## **the phone rings and the psychedelics kick in**

you slowly reach for the sky with a hope of touching that tune  
the tune drifting in and out of your memories from the seventh grade  
birthday party where you kissed a brown haired girl with wine on her lips  
the way the small of her back felt on your hand  
as you touched her when the kiss was just getting good right  
as it all ended when the light came on at the top of the stairs  
a voice called out for something someone had to do while breaking the  
moment of one of the top ten kisses you would ever have  
you slowly reach for that song again as your brain lights up the night from  
the top of the stairs that are different stairs but still all stairs you remember  
from the sixth grade birthday party and the girl with the wine on her lips  
as you kissed her how you spun around in your adolescent guts heart  
beating out of the ether from a new desire to always kiss girls with a  
breeze of wine on their lips

## **when a bassline breaks**

from a basement in South Minneapolis a garage in Midway St. Paul punching the pain the weirdness the oddity of punk rock adolescence the vinyl skipping skipping scratching the tapes dragging our angst through one good speaker unraveling us through the weekend the all ages shows piled 10 high in a car built for 6 the heavy air of clove cigarettes of the sweat of strangest strangers our friends for today maybe forever the bitter warmth of stolen beers maybe a little bit drunk holding our hands holding our hearts together we were all upside down flags of distress in this city together and alone smoking ashes under bridges brown-bag dreaming of burning a world we would never begin to know

## now to put it in simple words

writing spinning writing spinning spinning  
over blank white pages bound in books  
of words failing me in a room around  
me read surrounding me in spinning  
wandering through the Double Nickels on a Dime  
digging through the noise in between the noise  
the clanging steel wrapped strings singing electric  
free loose fists knuckle tight striking discordant  
chords thundering boom jazz groove  
thundering flannel Watt psychedelic Hurley  
monkey thumping speakers thumping low kicks  
guttural whoosh of drawl on the edge of a drawl  
drawn broken language

D.Boon falling propaganda white t-shirt docks  
of Pedro sunrise somewhere else out on the freeway  
twisted metal asphalt oil burn burning rubber  
smashed glass blood soaked dashboard  
a cassette tape spinning CCR ambulance arrives  
DOA leaving here to be Bob Dylan propaganda  
trapped in scratched ink tattoos cheap beer  
black t-shirt punk rock dust dancing across spinning  
black vinyl

**maybe these maps and legends**

a tattered distance between Athens and the moon  
an unmarked road winding dusty fields of ash  
past St. Mary's steeple into a musty basement  
pillow lipping lyric sheets across dust red coats  
everything from the driveway to the dishwasher to the copper tubing  
of a grandfather's legacy tucked behind a shed bottled in brown underground racing  
to the hills on Sunday morning to get the drop before God sees  
he is not in church again.

## **too hard**

listening to Kurt Vile and writing a poem about reading this to you

i'm supposed to stand here at the front before you in this bookstore and give you a word or two thrown together into sentences into lines into stanzas thrown together for a poem a poem that i read to you and a poem that you may or may not hear as your phone buzzes and you wonder who is calling and maybe you forget to turn it off and you are that person in the room that person scrambling for the phone with the embarrassing ringtone of some long gone pop song and in this moment you are me and you are at the front but maybe only in the middle and nobody listens to me when your song comes on maybe we are strangers maybe we are friends maybe i'll resent your phone or crack wise or roll my eyes and announce that truly there is one in every crowd one that forgets to check the phone before i stand at the front and read you a poem and you take the pressure off me and when your phone rings i wonder why my heart aches when i am sitting alone in my room and i think about my ringtone and how it's just an old phone ringing like the one when i was small and maybe a phone won't ring and instead i'll think about a band or a man who sings a song on a bench in the park or on a corner and you'll wish you were somewhere and really that's okay i'll wish i was sitting on the outside smoking and laughing and drinking beer and these poems here are not for everyone and you are not for everyone and i am not for everyone maybe an acquired taste in the word or two that i throw together into a sentence and a stanza and into a poem and this is a lovely song and so maybe we should turn off our phones and i should forget myself and my words and my bad habits and we should just listen together for a minute or two.

**there's a cross at every curve to commemorate**

a lone white cross commemorates with flowers a lonely brown bear some cards of grief a photograph a note memories of one who lived and died on this highway on this county road on this street corner in the backseat a duffle bag contains my own dust packed tight with a change of clothes as I drive these lines drop on my tongue inked in blood my father's shadow burned in super-8 reels spliced together on an ancient cassette a photograph in a wooden box

## **i used to be wanted dead or alive**

i thought i was a cowboy once and i tripped on a curb breaking my front teeth swallowing calcium chips and blood because brown liquor was bad for me and maybe not for the cowboys and the rock n rollers who made brown tea look like brown liquor in the bottle on the stage in front of the crowd and i believed it and i believed in them but they would trip like i did as humans, too, and their teeth were more valuable than mine they had stylists they had managers they had people who made them look not like me because they made videos and i bagged groceries and i washed dishes and i drove school buses so my teeth didn't matter and i crushed them on curbs drunk and falling down and they didn't in the videos like i did then and i am not a cowboy anymore

i scratch a name into my palm



## **the moment we close our eyes and this life ends**

when the wheels clicked into place--the gurney chrome and clean and well-oiled the room still cool quiet like i hope death will be when it comes for me

the varied-brown shades of the carpet industrial dated  
a single light on the night stand burning  
an old alarm clock ticks hypnotically

i hear a drip in the sink a sound that pulls me into the room  
into something i need to do

hands pale blue veined hands worn by work hands worn by pulling children from fires from rivers  
from car wrecks hands worn by turning bolts soldering pipes punching clocks holding picket signs  
loading anti-aircraft guns of WWII

hands never asking anything in return

the nails on the fingers a bit too long today  
uncut these last few weeks

a white t-shirt blends with the skin faded translucent now

eighty-eight years in this body and today we will say goodbye  
eighty-eight years of scars each scar a story  
of a time a place a bad decision an accident a memory  
scars like a roadmap through a life lived now over  
scars telling heroic stories stories of mistakes of lessons learned  
and sometimes we need to learn them twice

near the wrist a needle mark a small prick of an intravenous  
reminder a final scar

i don't want to say goodbye  
i'm here knowing that i have  
something i need to do

the undertaker's cologne is cheap heavy the kind of smell men inherit from their fathers timeless  
bitter oddly comforting the smell of shaving, of Saturday night, and Sunday morning a smell that  
flips pages of memories quickly and inefficiently a loop of images on the back of my mind

the man greets me shakes my hand and locks the wheels of the gurney with the metallic clink  
i am not ready  
he sees this in my eyes in the way i don't move as he enters the room

i am a wall between worlds

a white sheet black bag red velvet blanket  
all folded on the thin mattress  
everything laid out with respect according to tradition

i have never been one for tradition

i am asked to step out for a few minutes  
i do

in the hallway people gather people cry some stand stoic  
i am in a vacuum here head buzzes i don't care about the hallway someone has spun me around  
i don't know where i'm going i don't care about these people i don't care about  
this place my head buzzes and i want to be alone

the minutes haunting drag until i am asked back into the room  
i know it's time i have something I need to do

i don't want to

i am dazed knocked back by sudden memory kicked by all of the flash a little boy dressed as a  
fireman riding in the truck sirens whining a teenager lost alone broken  
a man getting ready on his wedding day all of the injuries laughter tears scars of my own  
the arguments misunderstandings the questions unanswered  
the car rides late nights fishing lessons repairs pulling me out of holes  
now over and done

i don't know where i am again  
my grandfather is now wrapped in the sheet the black bag there are no hands blue veins scars t  
here is no white t-shirt no skin only black only dead

there is something i need to do

i handle the head gently as on three we lift

i am so sure a body would be heavy heavy with the weight of life  
heavy with death my head still buzzing as i realize the ease  
with which i am able to lift the body as if the soul carried all weight

and i cry now

## **death debt or something in between**

as my grandfather slips slowly  
into madness  
into the next room

his mind turning on him  
and he wonders why

i lose the man  
always there

at two in the morning  
as i was stranded

finding myself alone  
on the edge of the city

at the end of a bridge  
was all i could tell him

through the pay-phone  
in a doorway

he found me  
and got me home

## **pinning last rites to a dwarf lilac bush in June**

my grandfather was there when I was born I was there when my grandfather died he swaddling me in blankets I wrapping him in a red cloak of death he as I was bitten by dogs as I ran wild into the night I swung on him he grabbed my hand smiled and swung back I wrapped him in the red death cloak I lifted his body onto the gurney his body old he was gone he was so thin bones I remember bones I remember my grandpa picking me up from the east side when I called at one o'clock in the morning I remember my grandpa only being afraid for me me at fourteen with no business in the place I was no business as a young kid on the edge of being strung out on the edge of at any moment making the mistake that would kill me my grandpa was not angry my grandpa was scared and in return I sat with him I helped him to the bathroom I helped him tune his radio I helped him remember I sat with him I helped him with the soup spoon the soup spoon that was not a soup spoon at all and this frustrated him in his mind the spoon was supposed to be bigger this is not a damn soup spoon I remember teasing him and calling him a tough Navy man whining about the damn spoon and I lived while he died

## **poem as i bury another dead friend**

motorcycle memory granting me never forever again the freedom of dreamers in a Motel 6 on a long  
Nebraska interstate 1992 on the way to something new something maybe better throwing airport baggage  
driving buses into the night gliding cool white waves of powdered snow higher than we could ever be  
riding logging trails on ill equipped motorcycles dancing on cliff edges to taunt God and the trains below  
knowing that our destiny was always a turned page separate stories but just in this moment  
you never told me who she was and that you one night you made a son that you would never know now you  
are dead he has spent his years calling someone else dad while the cancer eats at you from the  
inside and waltzes you slowly to your death it seems natural to buy a liquor store and keep smoking  
cigars in the end a legacy is written not in stone or bone or blood but chalk outlines a legacy is meant  
to fade wear disappear with wind rain sun and snow into the back pages of living minds and memories  
sharing the same fate each of us fear the inevitable pine box as we hope for walnut wood red satin  
the pallid gray skin and poor waxed makeup of the undertaker beyond that we just don't know

**inevitably a random memory rises up into the poem**

there is a ghost whistling in the alley  
i swear it is my grandfather  
he whistles static empty sounds  
he whistles old country songs  
he is turning to stone in the shadows  
thundered by the statutes of fallen icons

a television whistles on repeat louder still  
whispers over and over until  
i can't take it

i corpse walk my freedom to believe through dusty pages  
searching for a way to be shoved back into the wreckage  
i sort through righteous goodbyes isolated  
in dreams that have dogged me since the eighth grade

when stephanie let me hold her pale blue hand  
stealing mail-boxes beer and cigarettes  
only once then we spilled blood-worn  
and drawn out onto the highway

**the rules are different outside of the system**

feeling the bloodshot white of eyes  
tearing this skin i am in is nothing  
nothing sits shrieking in the sadness of  
the stories passed through coffee cans  
over the chain link fences of our youth

the dirty knees the scars and the stories  
they will whisper limp useless ideas  
through the daydreams through the drugs  
trapping each one in a corner  
asking questions turning corners

down blind alleys/  
one way streets

each going just a step beyond my memories  
of swing-sets/sandboxes

the dreams I had the dreams I never had  
the dreams I could have had

in the house of my grandfather  
the empty chairs/overturnd tables

I tell the story like I was there  
I laugh at jokes/raise a glass

I am beyond this experience  
beyond a grasp/out of reach

systematic neo-something  
or other



## **imagining this bar in Manly, Iowa**

wrapped tin skeleton surrendered blue paint   rusted ribbed roof corrugated side to side   asleep  
alongside   dusty circles of a forgotten main street   inside glass rings mark the aged mahogany top  
in faded white circles   inside you served drinks   you laughed   you stumbled and tumbled   inside you  
began to die   an image pinches me inside   i am wondering how to phrase this moment to whisper  
“dad” on the abandoned ghost heavy air   i continue to drink with the past as an imagined  
conversation drags   lingers into stale smoke as three-songs-for-a-dollar ghost the air around me   in  
my head   i imagine the soundtrack to car rides never had   fists we never swung   drinks we never  
spilled   as i wander here with all of this vacancy in my chest   i scratch a name into my palm   each  
drip of blood each drag of the pin pulls me closer to you   a ghost hanging on the walls   soaked into  
the dusty wood distance   the gray dust of my old man whispering across the bar whispering through  
the silence of these brown bottles and battered stools   is that you in the quiet spin of a ceiling fan  
is that the scuff of your boot marking the floor   is that your fingerprint smudged across   the  
window   a reflection i imagine i catch in the back-bar mirror just above the rails smashes my  
moment   as i throw down a five to   fight my way back out

**if i could have kept your hands warm for one more day**

how you cried when that boy died a super-ball lodged in his throat stealing his air bleeding  
from the finger scratches etched into his throat by the father who fought to save him

how the young boy in a garage stared at you his clothes melted into his skin  
how the idea of being so helpless ate at you how he became a paramedic

how two young Hmong boys died with bullets between their shoulders running away  
from the coverup that would follow their murder ghosts chasing you night after night

how countless lives slipped through your fingers more grabbed on clinging  
to the line you were throwing out so that tomorrow would new-day-rise again

how right was the only way for you no matter the cost the scoff the resistance  
of those around you who failed to think it through to the end the picture always small

if i could have kept your hands warm for one more day

i would have shared with you how scared I was of this world without you  
of how the roads would be rougher without the map you provided the broken things

more complicated the phone calls more lonely the days nights empty in silence  
i would have shared a dream that I have about saving the world from itself

from ignorance arrogance a lack of common sense an utter disgust at those  
in power that nearly drove you mad how we would talk for hours about nothing

i would have smiled and maybe asked for one more story of when you were  
fifteen and left school to work a pipeline in Alaska because that was the work

about leaving the house in the middle of the night to dodge the bill  
collectors finding your father hanging from a light fixture over the dining room table

about working in Canada on airplanes how seeing the flag draped boxes of dead soldiers  
led to your enlistment how the Navy lied to you about all you'd learn from them

how you took it all in stride punched a clock joined a union did what you could  
how you never gave up on me or anyone no matter how dark or angry or lost

distant or broken how you loved my children how you taught Rudy about building something from nothing the fine art hidden in every piece of junk

how Zaeva made you laugh and never tired you out how her screams were often welcome in the quiet of the house after grandma died

how you hated going to the movies and parties and being out in the world I believe the world scared you always aware of someone needing help

**there is no medicine for grief**

nothing to unwrap unbox nothing  
to swallow drink chew nothing  
to inject crush smoke from a glass pipe  
a cored apple or tin can nothing  
to shove in your jacket as the clerk looks away  
nothing to call in for a refill nothing  
on the dark web handed off by a man  
in a parking lot off  
of an interstate

only grief choking on itself soaking  
the sheets at 4am pulling you towards  
a concrete median at seventy-five miles  
per hour as you cross a bridge after  
work whispering from empty walls  
as you struggle with heating  
up leftovers three days old

only the empty bed each moment  
with one foot dragging the other through the  
shadow of photographs once hanging on the  
walls paper-wrapped in boxes  
now tucked under the stairs  
among the other boxes paper-wrap packed with  
all of the other griefs

i find myself resenting the freedom to play

**reading Frank Stanford-cooking dinner for my children-Bob Mould playing in the background**

i slip on simple things gliding my back mind things slow easy things rock-n-roll things rolling water things all things in these things for people who died things

i wait for Annie's boiling organic pasta i make for my children with canned (not-organic) chili it's a Monday evening when there is too much work i slip into a week only starting

Minneapolis in the eighties jumps to my front mind why Bob Mould tried to rumor hang him-gay-young self in a basement at a liberal arts college on the other side of the river

about how one may die so young early beautiful and raw  
never leaving the mark until years after death

i read Frank Stanford in my mind and in his dead-young-self a self wondering if he knew the words he wrote would fill a downtown punk rock bar with fan readers forty years later

while the changing shades of Candy Apple Grey of Arkansas breath of chutes ladders and lands of sweet teeth covered in ash of barrel burned books of burned diplomas of burned dreams i never talk

about burning gods with other plans  
tempt them when attention fills a need when fear when hurt when standing on ledges

bridges and barrel scarred bullets learning lines cannot be crossed  
i feel my knees stiffen as water boils i want to leave i want to run with Frank i want to mangle

music with Bob into the noise of the warehouse into poems of the secret south  
the fields the rivers the well the stars drunk on graveyard whisky and today

i'll make dinner i'll read stories to my kids

**safety pins**

(for Ellen)

when your new shoes have worn thin the shine  
faded gray when the holes in your best

blue jeans grow and fray i  
will be there with a rag

to shine and safety pins

you see I cannot stitch  
sew or weave.

## **when dust settles on the years we sleep back to back**

we have rings set aside on an aged nightstand set aside among the dusty books with their pages torn and yellowed from the nights before you slept here from before you took this moment in our lives to make it a life of our own to make it a life falling into another morning another passage one life falling into another to us when I stop to think about the years about you and me as younger versions of us as when we were dreamers of barn houses small towns road trips endless adventure



**we stack ourselves in dreams like stones in a Robert Frost wall**

our shoes trip us up every time we make our way down these stairs  
in twenty years we could never learn that wonders come with a cost

as we drift over the shore in black plastic bags  
stretched to the tearing point as the boxes float by with big dreams

a salamander suns itself on a rock in the distance  
without fear of one or more common genetic mutations

that makes its way through our spines  
until a decision is made on where it will choose to rest

**taking stock of a love like this**

(after Jim Moore)

we drink wine

we fall into the tapestry

of our love like this

we laugh at the way

we will fall down the stairs

we will let the water boil over

we will miss the coffee

we will fumble with our clothes

we will fumble between the sheets

    on the couch

        on the kitchen table

            early sunday morning

## **my son turns eleven**

mowing the lawn rolls his eyes  
resentment builds with each frustrating  
push and pull and drag of the old mower

curses whispered hot under breath  
between locked boy teeth he pulls  
and drags the old mower

hair disheveled skin kissed by the fading  
summer sun muscles tense growing  
into his own

## **i think my moment has passed**

monday

my teeth hurt from reckless pacing i clench my jaw  
into your spine together no less than we were before

tuesday

you roll your eyes you convince me that good fences  
are building the best lovers these days as i lean in to listen

wednesday

you give me a book of rhyme knowing i hate  
rhyme i take the book to burn resentfully when you are gone

thursday

we die for a while our skin aging pale white  
my teeth still hurting from the incessant pacing

friday

realizing i will never take you seriously we sit  
splintered on old stone walls reflecting on disaster

the weekend

stories written in chalk on sidewalks walls and doorways knowing  
i will never take you seriously in the designated nothing

all greater than one single moment

i think i missed it

**i listen to children playing at the daycare next door**

quietly i picture children of Syria of Iraq of Afghanistan  
i wonder if they are less innocent in their laughter than ours  
if they even laugh at all

i listen to children playing at the daycare next door  
i wonder about carrying my children from  
the rubble of our home to a border where we may  
or may not be welcome

i listen to children playing at the daycare next door  
and i wonder how long until I am grabbing  
my children in my arms and fleeing

**sleep study while lying awake at 4am**

sometimes  
i will watch  
you  
sleeping

eyelids flutter  
in your  
dream state

the slight  
curve  
at the corners  
of your  
mouth

you smile  
at something  
unknown  
to  
me

and laugh  
just a  
little

**poem from a late night in madrid**

stoned on hashish blurred in ripe red sangria  
Plaza Mayor at three in the morning our world turning  
oyster suckling pig buttered wild mushrooms  
the shops pulled inside out from tourists and hustlers  
each taking their turn welcoming the circus  
of new believers and fallen angels as cigarettes burn  
red in a ghosting haze we roll out into the square to fall laughing

an erotic sadness wraps us in the ghosts of this city  
you spread out before me in love and wonder as our  
bellies burn for more and more bodies heave  
in the breaking sky a glimpse of silvered  
moonlight breaks the shadows as we dance  
hair flowered and free in tossed black tangles  
a stifled cry tears open what is left of us here tonight

a smell of sweet incense as you steer me back through  
a too brief history of us soothing me into the belief  
that right here before me would be everything  
together we seize the air reaching out beyond the walls  
my head explodes technicolor circles of desire

i can't stand still while we watch the crush around us

soon a sun will rise to break this night  
take us back into the day while in that final moment  
you shaped me with your hand  
your mouth  
your heart  
your darkness  
you shaped me into today tomorrow  
everything yet to come

**upstairs Zaeva is pooling her resources**

in the basement i am sweating words  
too difficult to place on the page

i hear her shuffling in American Girl dreams  
as she moves from one world to another

my daughter dancing twirling  
as i am doing the same

i cursor my thoughts back and forth  
red letters and green highlights tell me where I am wrong

there is always something giving confirmation to my error  
back and forth back and forth back and forth

while her world is endless mine shrinks closes in on me  
words are all over this bungalow

she is everywhere at once  
i find myself resenting that freedom to play



## **something beautiful**

tragedy turned into turning something beautiful  
turned something beautiful for you to hold  
turning as you wrap yourself in the shower  
as you wrap yourself in the delicate something  
we made together after taking each our turns

you carve a name into the mirror fog  
with one slender finger one name  
no longer your name finger slowly  
carves one name hidden in the papers  
papers written in a language you cannot  
read the language read to you before another turn

a name drags with the finger that wears  
a ring the ring i gave you years ago  
giving you a ring another turn  
you carve your name because it feels  
like so long since you have spoken it  
the name you knew the name you never knew

a name changed as nothing gets better  
than it was before when the phone rang  
after your mother explained something  
something about a mistake a mistake that she  
made when she was dreaming of being a mother  
when she was riding a cool breeze in 1976 Korea  
like the one outside our window tonight as you carve  
your name into a medicine cabinet mirror run your finger  
over that name that name that was not your mistake  
a mistake someone made for you in their dream  
you live with it you live with never wanting to answer  
the phone with never wanting to wrap yourself in parts  
of something beautiful something beautiful i made for you

notes and other things to know

the title of the poem, *where the kids are setting up a free speed nation* comes from a line lifted from *Teenage Riot* by Sonic Youth off of the album *Daydream Nation*

the title of the poem, *there's a cross at every curve to commemorate*, comes from a line lifted from the song *Bloody 98* by Blue Mountain off of their album *Home Grown*.

the title of the poem, *maybe these maps and legends*, was lifted from the song *Maps and Legends* by REM on their record *Fables of the Reconstruction*.

the poem, *after The Carmelites have committed to stealing this night*, is based off of taking five random lines from "The Carmelites" by Mei-mei Berssenbrugge and creating a five section poem based on those lines.

*i dreamt your suicide note was scrawled in pencil on a brown paper bag* takes its title from Nick Flynn's poem *Bag of Mice*

*my favorite coup d'état* is a response/reworking to Alex Lemon's poem of the same title.

the poems, *when a bassline breaks* and *born (Miller Hospital)*, originally appeared in *Big Bell #9* 2016

the title of the poem, *now to put it in simple words*, was lifted from *Working Men Are Pissed* by the Minutemen from their album *Double Nickels on the Dime*

*i used to be wanted dead or alive* is inspired/responding to the Bon Jovi song, *Wanted Dead or Alive*.

*taking stock of a love like this*; in 2014, Deborah Keenan introduced to the work of Jim Moore. I think the best way to thank her for everything she taught me is to share a poem I wrote in one of her classes after Jim's work. Thanks, DK, for all you do, have done, and will continue to do in this beautiful, mixed up world.