

VISITATION AT GOGAMA

No shirt, was drying his long hair
with a towel and staring at the train,
he looked about 30.

I saw my birth father young and alive,
he stepped out of a brown house with a white
sign on the side: WILD BILL (his nickname)
in big block letters. I saw him the way he was
before he made me—
beautiful and astonishing in his maleness.

I tell you this is my family tree—no
noble phrases, no graveyards on the hill,
just visitations. Now pieces of discarded track,
explosion of purple wildflowers along the side,
solid wall of rock 5 ft from the train,
then a river/bridge/floating leaves
that look like giant lily pads—is that possible?
We're approaching the town of Gogama,
Ontario—small railroad town erased
by the diesel engine. There's a bar called
"Restaurant/Tavern" and a meat market
called "Meat Market" and a motel called
"Motel"—no other names.

In this place of no-naming or maybe
first-naming, I decide I'll call myself "bastard"—
it's plain and accurate, you can count on it.

We approach a signal, a woman in a
black tank top with killer arms slouches
in a grey Buick Century at the crossing
in a modified gangster lean. I decide
I love her, call her free.

CALIFORNIA CORRIDOR /

*. . . I am all of them, they are all of me;
they are farmers, I am a thief, I am me, they are thee.*

—ETHERIDGE KNIGHT

CALIFORNIA CORRIDOR

On the San Joaquin Line
between Modesto & Merced,
past the arroyos, past the fruit trees
in rows, rows—hands of the farm workers/
beauty always with blood behind it,
nothing free. The holding tank
& the drainage ditch, the cast-off trucks
of the workers, woman & child wait
for the angels of bread to swoop down
& bring the night with them, covering
her & her baby, feeding them, saying
sleep, sleep. This day, California is a wide,
wide lover—sweet & slightly off-key
in its song. Wacky & loose, the train rumbles
through Richmond, Martinez, ocean
on the left, gang tags on the right beside
the paper mills, refineries,
the brown, brown hills—
then explosion of jacaranda (red flower!)
more mounds of brown, beautiful
red, a young couple playing cards
across the aisle: does she know the way
he looks at her is what people spend lives
looking for?
They're laughing/curling into
each other—he in his little skid hat/she's in a
striped tee—this kind of desire the most
radiant—from the body outward—
No way to be in CA & not feel *frontier*—
so many suffering drought/poverty/
only the hills outlast us—
How to have body/space/land of the mind/
knowing the ravaged?
Be awake in it,
one rail tie at a time.
I want to be in the open—
Out here, the land grows wild hair on the side
of the tracks the way a dead man grows his—

dry, stickly—so stray—going to a place no one
knows. Mountains are the only salvation—
windmills on the left, “Golden West” train
on the right, truck junkyard:

You left your soul in LA, the guy across
the aisle says to his friend.

Then why does he look so alive?

I was here, I was loved. Were you?

We go through Pittsburg, CA—factories shut
down here, too—where I met Wild Bill.

Blue blue cerulean next to brown dead hills—
otherworldly with the windmills—
standing water, huge pallets for transport &
we are riding through a feeling—suspension—
Nothing, nothing can be done right now/
we are free.

Then all aboard in Antioch:

a skate punk kickflips his board
& sits down, hoodie w/skull & hat back-
wards, I love him for his pose, brilliantly
indestructible.

MY MOTHER WAS A DRESS

For years I was wearing her,
she was cotton, her neck a blue V
for her blue vagina that birthed 6 babies.
She had a vanilla string around
her waist even though she was hooker-red
at heart, like me.

I wore her for two years, along with
a sister dress of deep cherry.
When I went to meet her the first time
at Catholic Social Services, I wore the cherry
and she wore the blue vagina.

We thought that genetics had made us
go to Joseph P. Hornes to buy the V,
but decided we both lived
near the bloodless dept. store.
After that, I took her off,
stopped wearing her,
didn't want her touching
my body anymore.

I prefer to think it's all animal—
the way the V opens my neck to predators,
the way she scissored her legs open
to my father's cock.
The way the dress hugs my hips
then falls,
just like she said she hugged me once—
before falling away, switching
me out for sale.

|REVENANT|

Now what is holy?
Nothing, same as before.

Now it's:

/body of sturdy days; body of spasms, scrawny, familiar
body of fair play, limitations and reminders; aching
that interferes/shifting fjords and fissures;
body of arousal and the collapsing bridge:
shadow of the architecture that was my life.

I loved you and you served me: this is the prayer of the dying:

*Dear days: wash over me in a breeze—be around me—I'm walking through
you instead of grabbing—*

None of this is remotely believable.

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You know—the house floats away,
but the light's still on.

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I'm looking for that false sense of security, but all I see:

there is a shape there is a long road

*the mouth is saying: bluebird
quick look gone*

WE COVER OUR HEADS LIKE DEER

*Platte River Whooping Crane Trust,
James L. Grahl Research Center, Nebraska*

One poet of mixed Wendat/Huron/Metis/
Tsalagi/Creek/French Canadian/Portuguese/
Irish/Scot/English ancestry, born in Texas,
came of age in North Carolina,
Canada, and on the Great Plains.

Another born and raised on the
Fort Mohave Indian Reservation in Needles,
California, lives in Surprise, Arizona.

Me—American/Canadian/Polish/German/
Irish and unknown, born in Pittsburgh.

We're covering our heads with blankets,
walking to the cranes.

Allison says: *You need to be quiet,
put this blanket over your head and
walk like a deer.*

I look at her sideways, not knowing what
that means. I look at Natalie, who smiles
and covers her head.

They start walking toward the blind,
and I fall in behind, bending over a bit,
making myself smaller and walking
a straight line as they seem to be.

Natalie says, *Jan, look at the muskrat
by the side pool.*

I look, but see only grasses by the water.

Allison says: *See the guard birds—
they're coming back to alert and gather.*

I see thousands of sandhill cranes on the Platte,
feel the air full of their arriving, can't find
the guard birds. I hear nothing, see nothing
but what seems to be right in front of me.

I have to cough, wonder if that
will disturb the birds?

Allison says: *Just cough from deep
in your diaphragm, imagine you are a large bird.*