

*Dogs are Barking*

1.

I know where I came from, born up out of the half shell dog house, roof tin fence rusted right into summer. The bended sag of the wire gate, the warm rustled fur, the worn-down dirt, the dog shit, and all of us, blind pups and children, new in our bodies, snuffling for mothers in the hay.

2.

They've lit up a giant cross in the yard of the house where I was raped as a child. It's tall, strung in white Christmas lights, out by the twisted tree with the tire swing. The dirt still scraped smooth from children's feet. The empty dog lot. Concrete planters full of some other woman's orange and yellow mums.

We hunted coyote one night in the yard of the house. That man and me. Chicken thieves. The pulled-apart pieces of the hens' bodies strewn from the chicken shack to the back patio. Bloody prints pressed across the ground. I was thirteen.

I lay on my stomach in the hayloft. Rifle laid under me. The expanse of dark flooded all of the space out in the field. The shadowed stand of trees, the horses in their night movements. Cows spotted light against the fence wire. The complete silence of harvest.

We shot nothing.

The next morning, we found rooster feathers by the gate, farther on, the pieces of the bird, named Pretty Boy, I'd raised last winter in a storage tote, fed from the cup of my hand.

3.

My father said he'd do it for two grand but that he didn't do cleanup.

It was summer in Knoxville in the projects.

The man on the phone said the old woman had been in the tub for days and days. Died in that tub, started to drift apart, all the things that held her together torn up by time, and the slow softening of water. They'd taken the head, sieved the flesh, drawn out the bones, but they couldn't make the tub drain, couldn't force that woman down the

pipes. The fat set up in them, congealed like bacon grease. The whole building's plumbing gone wrong.

So they called my father, who was good with pipes and bad with money. My father, whose work clothes smelled always like body heat and rot, who took me to restaurants and told me about the shit bubbling up from the floor, about rats in the bean vats, about cockroaches the size of drain covers. My father whose work van was all Oatmeal Creme Pie wrappers and Coke bottles full of Copenhagen spit.

At the apartment, they had all the windows and the doors open, and the smell was outside on the sidewalk.

He is my father, and he is mostly a good one. He has never told me what it smelled like, only that it was outside on the sidewalk to greet him, only that it crawled inside of his nose and his eyes and his brain and clawed its way around.

The water in the tub was thick, black as motorcycle leather. Hair and stains up the sides.

It went like this: flush valve, overflow, rubber stopper (they don't give you proper traps in the projects), snake.

Towel tied round his face, gloves up to his elbows.

When it was all over, he put the snake and gloves and all of his clothes and underwear and socks and work boots in a black contractor bag. He said he knew a man one time convicted of murder because he liked his work boots too much, gave them to his father-in-law instead of throwing them out. At the end of the day, he said, you've got to get a new pair of boots.