

Red Doc>

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THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK
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for the randomizer

Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

—SAMUEL BECKETT, *Worstward Ho*



GOODLOOKING BOY wasn't he / yes/ blond /
yes / I do vaguely
/ you never liked
him / bit of a
rebel / so you
said / he's the
one wore lizard
pants and

pearls to graduation / which at the time you admired /
they were good pearls /
you said he reminded you
of

your friend Mildred / Mildred taught me everything I
know she taught me how
to entertain / you must
miss

her / I miss her martinis [stubs cigarette] so what's he
up to now / just got out of
the army / wounded /

messed up / are they giving him care / a guy shows
up with a padded envelope
of drugs every night I
guess

it's care / he staying with you / for a while / behaving
himself / some days he sits
around reading Christina

Rossetti some days he comes out of the bathroom
covered in camouflage
paint / keep him away
from

your herd / did I tell you I finished Proust / oh yes /
seven years / can you
reach me

those matches behind you / reading it every day /
thanks / was like having
an extra unconscious /
well I'm

not fond of those multivolume things / there's the
part where he's comparing
his Tante Léonie to a
waterlily /

she's a swimmer / no she's a neurasthenic / I don't get
it / well she's old nervous
lives in a single room
trapped in her little

train of habits the pills the pains the spying out the
window / hmmm / a
waterlily caught in a
current he

says / could be too late for me to appreciate Proust on
the other hand I'm at a loss
I've read all the Len

Deightons in the library / hundreds of people visit his
home every year some just
burst into tears / Len

Deighton / no Proust / say remember that time we
were driving and crashed /
what time / I forget where
it was I

was driving no you were driving I was looking out
the window all of a
sudden I thought I saw a
deer racing

out a driveway so I start to just then my brain flashes
on it being a wooden lawn
ornament not a real one

WATCH OUT FOR THAT WOODEN DEER I
yelled so loud you drove
off the road into a guy's
hedge and

burst into tears [she laughs he laughs] / speaking of
tears / listen [gets out a
cigarette] to that wind /
storm coming / or is it the
traffic / wind I think /
from the north sounds like
/ so your surgery is
scheduled

for when / the 25th / you want me to come with you /
no dear / well if you
change your mind / I
won't

change my mind / I can easily / thanks though / well
/ [glances down at her
crossword] I'll be fine /
well so / time for you to
go / I'll call on the
weekend / take some of
those apples they're the
kind you like

WIFE OF BRAIN

we enter we tell you
we are the Wife of Brain
at this point you have little grounds to complain we say
a red man unfolding his wings is how it begins then the lights
come on or go off or the stage
spins it's like a play *omnes*
to their places
but
remember
the following faces
the red one (G)
you already know (what's he done to his hair) his old friend
Sad
But Great
looks kind
beware
third Ida Ida is limitless and will soon be our king
scene is
a little red hut where G lives alone
time
evening

ANGRY WHY IS

everyone always angry on
TV. He shuts it off and
pulls the plug. On his way
to the underpass with the
TV a deer leaps out. All
stop as if condensed. A
wild cracky sound is up
first in birds overhead then
comes down and the deer
has it four times like a
rock sneezing. G moves
the deer ripples off into
fog and night. He stands
listening. Volume and
echo drip in the underpass.
He is balancing the TV on
a bit of ledge. Gravel
shifts behind him.
Perhaps the deer.

NOT THE DEER she hits
him a whack with a 2 X 4
down he goes his poor
poppystalk bent oddly
sideways. Thought you
were after my hiding place
she says. How he met Ida.
The sound of the deer still
raw in his lobes when he
wakes the next day. She
has brought him to a
bright fire and a white
fresh floor. Underpass
traffic roaring somewhere.
Her near the wall. Her
hand on his brow.
Another free dawn she
says laying a rag on the
headache oh. Vinegar
smell. Right angle ~~he~~ ^{concealment}
thinks. Thanks. Say
thanks. Lashing spokes
spin in his brain so he lies
still and dreams of the
leafless tree and the
absolute unobstructedness
of light that fell through it
a dream he'd had before.
An April dream.

EVER SHE SAID to G
and his brother after their
father died. I don't want
to live with either of you
ever. I'll move some place
hard for you to get to.
And she had. Taps her
ash. They are at the
kitchen table. Not the
same kitchen but the same
old yellow Formica table
he used to do his
homework at. Fifth grade
learning the kings of
England she sat by him
each gray morning with
her ashtray her red velour
bathrobe going over the
list. Kings and mornings
blend in his mind with
scenes from *I Love Lucy*
maybe it's the bathrobe
maybe the kitchen table in
its alcove. She is talking
about the garden club.
Pruning the lilacs her.
Physical therapy people
who've died he tells her
his old friend is back and
has a new name. They
discuss names. She has
the newspaper open and
reads out letters from the
Help column *I am an
intellectual giant* begins
one. They laugh.

Laughing with your mother. Coming out of the lake into a big towel and her arms. They haven't always talked easily. He used to think it would improve with age but lately she seems ever more bored by him. Than usual. He watches her face. Avoids detail. To simply say what comes to mind to simply float. Sometimes this does happen.

NOT THE FORSYTHIA

he doesn't let the herd eat the forsythia but knows they like to be amidst its blazing yellows. He stands they graze he watches. Ida watches. She puzzles him he puzzles himself. Her old plaid sportscoat his tendency to befriend catastrophe. She is innocent and filled with mood like a very tough experimental baby. Her drawing book open on her knees. Blackish iridescent hides shine green as sharks amid the herd. A lone white one (Io) glows like an idol and is Ida's favorite. She looks at her drawing looks back at Io sets her drawing book down on the grass. They smell she says. Why they're called musk oxen he says it's in a gland by the knee. What is? The musk. Some people hate it he says. You ever see a musk ox dip its head to touch its knee get out of the way it's going to charge but Ida is no longer listening. The oxen move slowly. They chew coarse

if she's looking
why is
she
smelling?

speaker
narrator

gaps in the weeds shifting
ever so slightly sideways
with their great brows bent
and the long fur sweeping
their ankles. Each head
has two horns that part as
neatly as a boy about to
play the piano wets his
hair and hopes it stays flat
for the whole recital. G
faintly smiles. It's their
looking down he loves the
steady way they pay
attention downward yet
are watching everything
else too. (A musk ox can
see 310 degrees around in
a circle.) Like cats he
thinks. Like cats Ida says.
What? Look easy to draw
but it's so not true. Ah he
says. I don't hate it she
says but G is frowning
now. His wings are rising
up on his back and he
wants to know why.

telepathy

in control

BIG GOLD LION ^(head)
comes loping along.
Army pants bare chest
barreling down the
towpath just misses Ida.
She yells and jumps.
Takes on a glow. There
she goes scrambling onto
Io. Wait a minute says G.
Ida is kicking Io's sides
urging the great white
bulk to move. It doesn't
move. It hoists its huge
head around and gives a
What now? look at Ida's
exalted foot dangling there
it's hard to believe this
gnat is pesking her. Then
some inside switch flicks
on. (She is a beast
constructed for smooth
striding.) Now long pelvic
muscles organize her and
the vast loosejointed
shoulders glide forward
into movement. I'm a ride
a white ox uptown and see
how I mix! Ida calls back
and has the wit to tuck her
knees under the ears. G
stands watching people
dodge sideways off the
towpath. Something more
than Ida has moved out of
his control.

personification

bulk

atashpore

LOVE'S LONG LOST
shock the boy the man he
knows him. Knew. The
lion head the sloping run a
lavishness in him made you
want to throw your soul
through every door.
Memory sucks it all
backward. Hands and no
place for hands last
morning later you realize
that was our last. Take my.
Fuck. Tiled floor a suitcase
standing bleeding no thank
you yes. No. Yes. Thin
red tracking no. Yes. Your
nose is he says. Take my
white skin yes take it my
astonishing morning it's
fine. Bleeding he says.
The other. Last. No. Yes.
No. Take it. My
handkerchief. Fine. What
if he does. Your taxi is
here. Who says this. Your
redletter brain as you
struggle and sift longlost
puns comes a torrent of
noise each cell shimmying
on its little mitochondrial
hilt. Pure energy there.
Memory is exhausting. G
sits down on the ground.
The man had been his
oxygen once. When he left
there was no oxygen.

*Science
for
death*

But cell death can confer
advantages. Differentiation
of the fingers and toes
occurs in a developing
human embryo because
cells perish in these places.
We all make good use of
separate digits in our life
but then (so Proust) catch
sight of an old glove and
burst into tears. G weeps
thinking of Proust. The
oxen arrive softly around
him.

Wife of Brian
WIFE OF BRAIN (*heart?*)

hits the floor if a Truck
backfires can't
stand
the smell of diesel or rain in May you ever see
their orders were to mow the children no one
let A pig in the shape of a down pig Bleed would he
Ever *let* a pig bleed to
spared at such evening your nightfall bleed drugs in
they
come with the death in a padded bleed
he said sweet
mead *I have to*
Let the pain the blades the steeds the brittle children
carving
Vicodin methadone Paxil *let* a big X
Drank
out a nightfall across his belly
let Cut
sweet Out
the pain out

TV IS LOUD

in the waiting room he enters she is sitting. He doesn't remember it she always will. He doesn't see the nurse coming down the hall she does. He doesn't notice the other one the stacked trays the syringes rounding the corner just as the nurse and they collide. Trays syringes fly crash she thinks oh no. He hits the floor in a crouch her heart is going fast. His ragged eyes pouring in every direction fists up neck shiny with sweat her watching fear judder to a halt all over his body. Both blush. He laughs and gets up she looks away. He has pissed himself she bends over her drawing. *Suppose a lone man.*

YOU A TUESDAY
appointment like me / I
guess / always writing in
that book / not writing
drawing / drawing what /
my sunny

self / got a name / Ida / I'm
Sad / why / no it's my
name Sad But Great .
capital S capital B capital
G people call

me Sad / that some type of
indigenous name / army /
army make you have a
certain name / make you
have a

certain everything / how /
orders / but your name is
your fate can't take orders
on that / no / no / so what's

narrator
Ida mean fatewise / Ida
means *idea* / who told you
that / Greek guy he says
Ida is a verbal word for
the way

you see inside your mind /
no shit / that's the gist / so
look at me Ida what do
you see inside your mind /
see a hole right through
the middle of you

THEY DO NOT
talk more that day.

SO THEY'RE RED / no / is he

red / yes / wings / yes /
okay I do know this guy /
from the army / [laughs] /
what's funny / idea of him

in the army / why'd you
enlist / oh people thought
I'd be better off / off / I was
getting into mischief /
people

like who / Dad / mischief
like what / is this an
interview / I like to close all
the loops / here's the thing
Ida either we

sit here and close loops or
we go stir up some shit /
shit. like what / where'd
you say he keeps this herd
/ down by the overpass /
well that's it then

HAVE THE DUSK
deepen. Equal trouble.
The one helpful thing she
said to him that summer
whether you keep this man
in your life or put him out
equal trouble. Is it the
adverbs. Have the mother
speak have the boy speak.
In. Out. Years ago. All
those darlings. Out where.

WIFE OF BRAIN

not Ida's idea but nonetheless to
introduce her two new friends the one
a lonely herdsman the other kind of
messed
up by war but having
realized at once when
she got
to the little red door &
heard the word *You!* said by both gentlemen with
simultaneous
stress her own
redundancy she called out *Shoot*
I'm as hot as a rat in a wool sock and
vanished *ad hoc*

TYPICAL NIGHT-
HERDING SONGS gallop
their rhythms and tell of
love. G doesn't usually
sing to the herd at night.
He may talk to them listen
stand in the herd. Listen.
That community. A low
purple listening but with a
height to the sound. Them
listening. They direct it up
and out. They stand in a
circle facing away from the
center (calves in the center)
and the long guard hairs
hang down to brush their
ankles like pines. Like
queens. Like queens
dressed in pines. Musk
oxen are not in fact oxen
not castrated bulls nor do
their glands produce musk.
Much is misnomer in our
present way of grasping the
world. But pines do
always seem queenly as
they sway so grand and
anciently from the sky to
the ground. Motion is part
of listening. As the night
goes on let's say he's there
for a number of hours the
motion changes. At first
they just shudder a bit like
any large entity come to
rest but gradually

imperially they begin
swaying. Then as one
rhythm they pass the sway
from shape to shape around
the circle its amplitude
increasing its warmth rising
from knees to hearts to eyes
its pressures rolling across
the large loose joints of the
shoulders and down the
long bones of the hips until
at some point with a
phrasing as simple as a
perfect aphorism one of
them spins up off its shanks
and performs a 360-degree
spin in air and returns to
place. Slotting itself into
the undulation of the others
as firmly as *temptation* into
I can resist anything but.
He slips from thought to
thought. Wilde Wild
Wildness does surely attract
him although what he
knows about it is not much.
Knows (with the oxen) that
they prefer common gorse
to willow shoots and can
balance the topheaviness of
their bodies by plaiting
their feet as they walk.
While with Sad he knows
don't mention warplay.
Funny word warplay.
Never says war or warfare.

remembrance
of head

I've seen a lot of warplay
he'd say. Warplay had me
pumped those years. Tip of
the spear. Flipswitch
inside. She hit the ground
75 saw the white bag 75
bullets tore her head off I
saw her hand. I wasn't
going to tell anyone back
home about. Oh it found its
way out it surfaced. I had a
tan when I came home no
wounds no cuts. Everyone
kissed me. Sure I sat by the
fire I talked to the old man.
There were the smells. The
bone beneath. Sweat broke
out on me at breakfast. I
didn't expect to come home
that was not in the plan.
Some point I guess the
brain cells just give out.
You read a hundred
military manuals you won't
find the word kill they trick
you into killing. You get
over it it's ok. You have to.
Fear not tolerated. Take
you out back and shoot you
they say. Her eyeglasses in
the grass. Standard
questionnaire. Fine just
say fine. Numb yourself.
Wire-frame. Does it feel
good at first yes. Play.
Guns. Fire. Animals. You

know the Carthaginians liked to use oxen for night fighting. I'm talking about Hannibal I'm talking about the battle of Ager Falernus 217 BC. Like tanks but more frightening. They'd tie lit torches to the horns and stampede them toward the enemy. The Romans panicked some ran into the herd some got knocked off the path to the crags below others tried to retreat and were lost in the tundra never seen again. But what about I'm asking what happens when the torches burn down to the horn to the hair to the head to the bone beneath. So much human cruelty is simply incidental is simply brainless. Simply no common sense. You could take the entirety of the common sense of humans and put it in the palm of your hand and *still have room for your dick.*

is this
can
upstream

IT WASHES HER up from the bottom. Slow fluids of dark slide past each other at different speeds. Light she ignores. Waking is gradual lines of dark into sounds. They line up. Before they do is a moment of terror happening every day she every day forgets. Dry little sound is a bird's neckbones sifting into place to sing. Its eyes open and widen. Birds with bigger eyes sing first. Rackety every day to hear this every day forgets. A passing snake splits by. Reds leap the clouds in a wind stirring everything tall all the way out over the river and pinwheeling back as the membrane cracks. Open. *water*
The heavens are perfect. Perfection sounds round. Good morning good Io. Bird drops its note into the round and round the note goes circling the wall of the world and stops. After stops is a gap she listens down into for someone who comes *takk takk takk* along she hears *takk takk* slow down and eye and hesitate and *takk takk*

takking past. Someone insists and someone will hesitate at this hour. With the heavens perfect and all gazes wet and the bird drops another note into the round and round. Coolly every day forget forgetting all but this not the difference between this and winter does she long for it winter. Where waking is. Where two cloven halves of her hooves clocked in ice and blood crisping along arteries at minus twenty-three degrees is a glory to her. Winter exists and winter is never soon enough. Awake.

HELLO hello / please speak to Sergeant First Class
Sad But Great /
it's the middle of
the night may I
ask who's

calling / I am Lieutenant
M'hek / sorry who /
warrior transition team of
Sergeant Sad / you're the
team /

small team / you're the
guy who comes every
evening with the drugs /
no my team is
nonpsychotropic / so

what do you do / talk /
does that help him / one
test for this question /
what test / did he cap
himself yesterday /

no / did he cap himself
today / no / so talk helps /
see your point / how we
talk how we are allowed
to talk is

the most part of happy or
not / your accent I can't
place where are you from /
place you never heard of

far far north so far north it
is south [laughs] / your
English is good / thank
BBC / really / really all
night

radio / I'm impressed / I'm
shrewd toiler / what do
you think about Sad /
cannot discuss / ah /
behind his head /

I understand / how about metaphor / okay / if a man is ruined
like a ditch don't keep
washing your hands in

him / say again / sorry poor translation / of what / of old
proverb / ah / well / I'll tell
him you called / tell him

*at the bottom of the ocean
is a layer of water that has
never moved this I heard
on BBC last night fresh
idea to me / okay will do /
bye*

WIFE OF BRAIN

They drank bright mead in cups of gold
They drank bright mead to catch his shrieks
They drank bright mead what kind of knife
They drank bright mead between his cheeks
They drank bright mead was the melody someone sang

You ever see a Pig
In the shape of a man

Shook over hell

And on you went

The teeth it

Shattered the tongue

It rent

You drank bright mead and After bright mead you drank
Nightfall

BATTER THIS WORD
he thought too dramatic
until the wind rips the
house off the house or so
it seems to him waking.
From a torrent of small
dreams and village guilts
battering the world at full
north across his tossed-
open bed. Naked man in a
state of fact sprawls on the
couch. Help me G calls
out as he dashes to secure
the big double panes
bucking on their hinges.
Snow and ice chunking in.
Sad groans in his sleep.
An iron bar has to fit
through two loops on the
windows. G is forcing it
into place when he thinks
in sudden panic of his
herd. Count the herd first
thing each day. But the
herd is a hundred miles
away in a different
morning dear bolometric
presences and steaming
hides how he longs to put
his hands on them. Io
would slip her horn under
his arm and let him rub
her great hard furred
forehead. Sad thrashes
and slips off the couch.
Fuck. Day glares open.

ANOTHER TOWN
SLAPPED silly by wind it
doesn't matter where.
Towns are all the same
and night more elusive the
more north they go. Sad's
rules. Night driving. Day
sleeping. Ever more
north. No tree no bush no
barrier no edges or scale
just a huge flat hand that
sweeps where it will and
wrecks what it wrecks.
Why didn't I bring Proust.
G lays his head on the
table it sinks into the table.

A LITTLE ZIPPER whine
that runs along the
convolutes of his ear
licking in under every
bone like a bad emotion.
It could be morning noon
midnight the sound never
stops. He stands watching
a thousand whitecaps go
diagonal on the bay.
Components of today
include a shape asleep on
the floor an erased white
world the tumblers
vibrating in the closet and
he brought the wrong
book. Alive in a room as
usual.

¹⁶²²⁶
WEIGHING IT IN his
hand he pauses then
throws it across the room.
Does he hate *Today I*
Wrote Nothing: The
Selected Writings of
Daniil Kharms translated
from the Russian by
Matvei Yankelevich for
some good reason or for
not being Proust. Sad is
grinding his teeth. G turns
on the radio. Think of
yourself as a jar says BBC
4. The words are honey.
Pour the honey into the
jar. G thinks of himself as
a jar. It is vaguely sexual.
What was it like to feel
sexual. To want say this
person on the floor. Or
any person. Sexual
situations yes the haste
and ramming yes the hot
cold amazing difference
between before and after
as if a diagram shot inside
out he remembers the
diagram but the feelings
no. Necessity no. One
night under the overpass
they'd got the sex whiff
again. Made a few
fumbles. Not enough
juice for the squeeze as
Sad so neatly put it.

Whose courage? Is anything serious? Daniil Kharms used to lie down on the highway to see if traffic would stop (it did) then walk away. G stands up from the table. He will make his way to the town swimming pool and see what they think of his rather majestic redwinged breaststroke.

GATHERING SWIM GEAR in the bathroom he glances at the mirror. Sharp stab his face no longer young no more beauty impact. Get used to this. Other ways to navigate the world. Did Daniil Kharms have this particular rug pulled out from under him one day in a bathroom in Leningrad it seems unholy to ask. By all accounts a tall striking man who liked to stroll the boulevards in English tweeds and hunting cap. Destitute hungry hounded by the police he wrote *What big cucumbers they sell nowadays!* in a poem about a man who beat another to death with a cucumber during the siege of Leningrad. Miraculous to have a friend like Daniil Kharms a release from causality. But other people's suffering you want to boil it down theorize it historicize it make it go away. G does not like to think of DK lying on the floor of his cell in the psychiatric ward of a Soviet prison

hospital far removed from
English tweeds from
cucumbers from his own
body. Far removed from
his first wife second wife
and several children who
presumably also starved to
death along with the
soldiers and the animals in
the zoo. No Jesus to
cleans it or koan to throw
it off a bridge no Zeus to
blast it to Tartaros. You
look at your face your face
is old but suffering is
older. Sounds from the
other room. G slips to the
hall and opens the door.
Gone swimming he calls
back as the wind slams.

CROWS AS BIG as barns
rave overhead. Still
driving north. Night is a
slit all day is white.
Panels of torn planet loom
and line up one behind the
other to the far edge of
what eyes can see. Just
ice says Sad. He opens a
window and sea fog pours
in. They are passing a
beach. Black chunks of
lava pile on tangles of
black seawrack. Waves
tower and smash. White
foam explodes upward.
Stop if we see seals says G
but Sad appears not to
hear.

BLUER THAN HOLES
in blue are his eyes. He
loves driving into this
emptiness. Place that is
nothing else but what it is
he says. What do you
mean G thinks but doesn't
ask. Sad would just repeat
it. G would just get mad.
Do you believe in
explanation? I saw a
show on TV says G where
a cheetah's chasing a
gazelle. They slow down
the film just as it
overtakes it you see a little
claw flick out the wrist.
Whose wrist? says Sad.
Cheetah's says G.
Cheetah trips the gazelle.
Lands on it. Eats it.
Know your weapon says
Sad. They drive on. Past
cliffs and ice fog steaming
down. Ponies in a circle
with noses together and
tails blown straight out
horizontal to the wind.

DAD AND ME and Spam
I ever tell you that story?
G says no. They'd pulled
off the road to eat. Blow
the door off the car fuck
says Sad when they try to
get out so they stay in the
car. Fold back the cover
of the roadmap to cut
Spam on. G asks if Spam
reminds Sad of the army.
Sad says no Spam reminds
him of home. We used to
fish catfish from a muddy
lake more of a swamp
near our house so one day
we're out fishing I'm
baiting my line and off the
stern goes the can of Spam
into the lake - that's our
lunch says Dad damned if
he doesn't make me dive
in there ~~and get it.~~ You're
joking. No joke I can still
see it go flash down the
water and in I go and up I
come with a can of Spam
and *that ladies and
gentlemen that is the
reason why I am a
homosexual today!* G
laughs. Sad cuts another
slab and looks out at the
wind.

SULLEN SKY PADS
soak out whitely. Day and
night alike. Temperature
dropping. Car skidding on
its chains. They pass
cliffs with white shocks of
waterfall down them and
swallows soaring in and
out holes in the rock. *If the
sky were crooked, it
wouldn't make it any
lower.* G stares at the
swallows. To have a
friend like that. He still
hates the book but is
beginning to love the man.
DK's face on the cover is
pure fury and girl's lips. G
briefly pictures himself
saving DK's life –
swooping low in the
window of the state prison
hospital with a bowl of
steaming soup. Stay just
long enough to see the
broken eyes shine up at
him then be on his way.
But the dark fact is no
bowl of soup could have
sustained Daniil Kharms
through the 900 remaining
days of the siege of
Leningrad and a sudden
astonishing quiet descends
on the car. They are
rounding a corner into a

tall narrow gorge between
cliffs. Wind is gone.
Sound is gone. Or going
strangely. He looks up
and sees a hundred
streams of meltwater
plunging down the face of
the rock each no more
than a hand's breadth
across. Each closed in its
own pitch. The pitches
mingle and do not
their straight silver
frequencies. But
Sad is rummaging under
his seat for the map. They
told me to watch for this
he says. Now I know
where we are!

ICE GETS DIRTY light is low. They go round three quick turns and everything begins to intensify. A gleamingness that hurts the eyes without improving visibility. The car rebounding from side to side as it clatters over the ice. What ever happened to your autobiography says Sad you were always fiddling with it in the old days. I gave it up says G. Nothing was happening in my life. They look at one another and start to laugh. Sound comes cannoning off the walls.

How do they know other?

INSIDE THE GLACIER but how and where and why no one says the word *lost*. We're going a new way says Sad as they head toward what looks like a big doorway. G has maps open but in the dimness cannot read them. The road stops at a square red sign IMPASSIBLE. They don't mean us says Sad backing up to go round the sign.

MELTWATER AND
DEBRIS slosh alongside.
They are descending. It is
very quiet. Air pressure
changing inside the car
and the road dips. Comes
a hiss a whiplash groan
overhead they duck. Car
stops. Nothing. Let's
reconnoiter says Sad. As
they step out sharp cracks
go like guns somewhere
above them and Sad
recoiling at each sound.
There is a creak of vast
doors. A rush. More
guns. G oddly calm. He
is noticing the ice give and
give back underfoot like a
trampoline. Corner.
They round it and the
world stands still. Huge
ice. A sort of cavern all
one color as if squeezed
out of a tube. Wow the
blue says G. He starts to
bounce.

QUIT BOUNCING
FUCK (Sad). Sounds
keep backfiring past them
in all directions. But now
G is staring down the
cavern. Something seems
to be pressing itself out of
a fault in the ice. A
humanlike form. Dressed
in what could be a silver
tuxedo. Shimmers faintly
and pauses. Not glancing
to either side. An
intentness to it. See that
says G. See what says
Sad. Creak. Rush. Guns.
The faint form seeps
toward another fault in the
ice and is gone. Even
amid the cold of the
cavern some deeper chill
wafts back to G and Sad
where they stand.

SAD TOLD (M) this story once I'm not sure I believe it but you can judge for yourself. It's about a friend of his who spent some years as a mercenary. One winter the friend's outfit got stuck in a town of North Africa. Pointblank light. Radiantly cold. He had a headache all the time. Walking the beach one morning he met a boy he thought was a girl and they got into a bit of a talk a bit of a way of meeting here and there day by day. F called him Lucky. He was a courtly boy. If they slept on the roof Lucky laid a piece of veil over F's face to keep the wind out of his mouth. During the winter F came to know Lucky's mother too a wide-bodied person who wore a man's workshirt over her clothes and had both breast pockets filled with earth where she was sprouting cucumber seeds. Nice and *chaud* she'd say patting her pockets. She supported herself and the boy by keeping a cow in

the back kitchen. For its milk and its urine. Urine? said F. Painter's piss she said meaning the local bad folk art got its signature bright yellow pigments from the urine of cows fed on quince.

Sometimes they would all three of them put on her lipstick and head to town for the evening. After a few whiskeys she'd always repeat in English the same verse of the King James Bible and laugh. *Catch us the voxes the quick little voxes.* Her son is studying his nails. He glows at night. The night he dies there are red plush curtains at the door shoved aside. A man of town power comes in looking for Lucky. Talk fades the air falls there's a gash of language from the man and he slaps Lucky twice. F rises the mother rises too placing herself directly in front of F so he cannot move. No one is using their eyes on one another they're waiting for a letter that has already arrived or is it time shifting five

beats forward now it is F
who suddenly sees a lung
dribbling and a gray cry.
He sees shadows cast by
flesh that shreds on the
edges of a wound sees the
little sucking sound of
edges as they smolder
open and the red light of
the cardiac cavity that's
Lucky dying yet this has
not happened yet. It
happens. And from that
moment F cannot stop
seeing five beats ahead of
time all the time for the
rest of his life. Every
minute is foreclosed. His
present tense abolished.
No tooth he breaks on an
olive will ever again be
unforeseen. He breaks it
anyway.

THE ICE FAULT is a slot
in the ice as tall as a man
that vanishes back into
shadow. A smell of
something brisk and
incongruous laundry?
sunlight? lingers at the
entrance. G drops to his
knees to peer in. Cold
stabs up through his
trousers. Sad has
retreated to the car and
started the engine which
echoes monstrously
everywhere. Moving out!
Sad yells putting the car in
reverse.

WAS IT SHACKLETON whose teeth shattered at something-
something below zero G
once asked his brother (the
biochemist) and why.
Because teeth are porous
and can fill with droplets
of water which instantly
freeze in subzero
conditions. The glacial
walls go tapering away
from him down the ice
fault. He plunges into a
world at once solid and
dissolved but weirdly
shadowless as if without
dimension. He is colder
than ever in his life. Vein
by vein as separate
numbnesses. Heart
crashing in his chest.
Gelid wings clack on his
back. He can hear the
wings move but they are
someone else's wings and
his teeth are in pain.
Freeze means expand
means shatter said his
brother. G closes his
mouth.

THAT OLD CLICHÉ

of polar adventure fatigue
flooding his body in
waves. This wonderful
longing to lie down surely
he's been walking for
years surely he should
stop and rest a moment
against one of those satiny
planes of ice that allure on
every side. Cucumbers
Shackleton Spam why is
everything draining away
why this silver ebbing and
flowing not quite reaching
his brain. He is so tired.
Pour the honey into the
jar. He dozes. A sudden
violent sneeze shatters
him in all directions. Oh
he says aloud let's not die
in the jar and with an
effort that seems to rip his
spine apart arches his
upper back. Stiffened
wing muscles pull hard
against their roots and
move into a lift. Pieces of
ice break from the
primaries and fall in a
shower. Again he strains
backward and up against
what seem like seams of
steel thinking maybe I
can't do this but all, all at
once the coverts jolt

terribly free and the motion begins. He is rising. Air grabs his knees. Out of black nothing into perfect expectancy – flying has always given him this sensation of hope – like glimpsing a lake through trees or that first steep velvet moment the opera curtains part – he is keening down the ice fault. Soul fresh. Wings wildawake. Front body alive in a rush of freezing air. He opens his mouth in a cry as red sadness pours away behind him and the ancient smell of ice floods every corner of his skull.

WHY BIRDS HAVE no arms—if you are human you fly with arms straight out in front and horizontal to the ground. To give least resistance. Of course it's exhausting. Don't fight it just do it says G to his arms. He visualizes little pistons all over pumping him forward and this helps for a while but the ache is spreading from his spine in every direction. Down the ice fault pours a steady cold channel of headwind against him. He knows he is slowing and probably looks ridiculous. Am I turning into one of those old guys in a ponytail and wings he thinks sadly. Something skims his cheek. He waves at it vaguely. Predators. His heart sinks. People talk of eagles with a wingspan of 3 meters in the northern regions. He begins to imagine his own heroic death as told by Daniil Kharms. *If the sky* – but now the air is darkening around him and strange vectors dive whizz swoop – he gasps suddenly

realizing what it is. Not predators. Ice bats! They are blueblack. They are absolutely silent. They are the size of toasters. And they are drafting him down the ice fault with eerie gentle purpose. A spearhead in front and a convoy each side. His shoulders begin to relax. Is there an etiquette for this he should worry about? Theoretically he can gain 35% efficiency by riding their wheels a while. But it should be some sort of exchange. On the other hand theirs is a volunteer intervention and they do look tireless despite all going so fast there's a smell of burning - he is thinking this odd this smell of burning when the whole mass of them veers around an ice bend and arrives in a vast garage.

ICE BATS GO nimbly and can stop on a dime. Here's how you stop. Flap both wings downward creating a vortex above the leading edge of each wing this allows you to hover. Then flap once upward to release suction as you glide from the flight path in an attitude of careless royalty and subside onto some ledge or throne with neatly folded fingerbones. G's descent is less fine. He slams into the blueblackness ahead of him not expecting it to stop. Or instantly disperse. Each bat goes whizzing its way into an aperture in the back wall. BATCATRAZ says a sign nailed up there. G drops to the ice floor stunned. Clever of you to come in the back way says a voice. G looks up.

A SPARKING TOOL in one hand indicates he is soldering something. The man is wearing grease-stained overalls. You're looking for the clinic he says pushing up his goggles. G notices a car hoisted aloft behind him. Not that I know of says G.

Repaired

DULL CLANKING SOUNDS

bring Sad around the bend. He jolts the car to a halt and climbs out. You open today? Replace my drive shaft? to the man in overalls who gives Sad a moment of study. Then turns to stow his tool. Dandy he says. Let's hoist her up and take a look.

HE WAS FOURTEEN
it was years ago and Sad's
name wasn't Sad yet. First
comet. G had just
stumbled off a bus they
looked at one another and
that lasted until G was
almost twenty but he.
Well. Being a loyal soul
himself. Sad's need to
make friends everywhere.
Sex friends club friends
gym friends dope friends
shopping friends
breakdown friends a
common enough problem.
Sad didn't see a problem.
One day he looked around
and G was gone. The
farewell letter erased and
rewritten so many times it
tore through the paper.
Tearstained laughter a
phrase G blushes to
remember. *Talking is like
drowning* etc. He had laid
the letter on the kitchen
counter. Moved it.
Moved it back. Quiet
ticking kitchen. It was the
middle of the day. Middle
of the world. *Let's get this
bandage off quick.* He
went over the letter in his
mind afterward for months
imagining Sad reading it

Sad pierced by it Sad
racing down the street
with it in his hand. This
letter that in fact fell down
behind the sink and wasn't
found till two years later
by some friend of Sad's
who fished it out and
started to read it aloud - to
his credit Sad stopped
him. Anyway the
driveshaft proving
uncooperative they break
for a cup of tea. The man
in overalls has an office in
the clinic behind the
garage and a lab coat on a
peg by the door. He
changes from overalls to
lab coat. CMO says the
lapel in gold cursive. He
sees G looking at this. I
just fix cars for fun he
says and laughs an uneven
laugh. What's a CMO
thinks G but doesn't ask.
They follow into a sort of
lobby. And there in the
morbid light is a tall
dazzled man who sweeps
onto Sad saying I knew
you would come.

WIFE OF BRAIN

first reversal they've come
by mistake to a private clinic beside a glacial lake run
by a guy in overalls who (luckily) does know how to install
a driveshaft although he
just laughs when
they ask how

long it will take "reversal" because
the short road trip Sad
had in mind is soon to be redefined
by one who calls himself
a god and is

arguably no fake "reversal" because little snags come tumbling
out of the text like what's it like
to be a prophet (a 4NO) and would you decide
to
act your age
if you really could see what's next

YOU SPELL IT number 4
letter N letter O no space
all caps: 4NO / is it a
nickname / no Babycakes
it's functional the fucking

army being a fucking
fulcrum of fucking
functionality / they called
you 4NO in the army / are

you going to repeat
everything I say / sorry
/ pass the sugar / so you
knew Sad in the army /
indeed I did / he

says you can see the future
you're a prophet / no I see
Seeing I am the god of this
I see Seeing coming /

what's that like / all white
all the time / what do you
mean / I mean the whole
immediate Visible crushed

onto the frontal cortex is
nothing but white without
any Remainder now you'll
say of course there's no

Remainder if a thing hasn't
happened yet! but the
fact is most of what you

people see most of what
you

people call the present
world is just Remainder
just a failure of
Invisibility's flames to
disappear from that

thin edge / a failure / they
were always coming up to
me saying 4NO who'll win
the hockey pool 4NO your

name means Foresight
better get some 4NO
you're the god who knows
the future how come you
got yourself

fuckstuck in this
meatclock didn't you see it
coming / well didn't you /
what I saw coming was
the atomic

essence of the Visible
brought to such a density
its Incandescence left no
place for anyfuckingthing
else /

ah / or am I talking outside
your experiential zipcode /
sort of / give me that sugar
again / so this white stuff's

coming at you all the time
/ yup / you can't stop it / I
can slow it down with
alcohol or pharmaceuticals
I

choose not to / was it
different in the army / hell
yes we were drugged to
the eyeballs / Sad doesn't
talk about

that much / no I bet not /
well he mentioned
something at a crossroads
/ say again / a crossroads a

woman a shopping bag a
white plastic bag I don't
know / here's some advice
/ yes / don't ask about the

woman don't ask about the
crossroads don't ask about
the plastic shopping bag /
okay / don't ask him don't

ask me / okay / time for
my meds I'll leave you
now / it was a pleasure /
oh I doubt that

WIFE OF BRAIN

4-B Ration
24-Hour Ration
Battle Ration
Combat Ration
boiled sweets
Combat Ration for One Man
Combat Ration for Five Man
Field Ration
First Strike Ration
Garrison Ration
Individual Food Ration
do you ever think about Bakelite closures bronze amphoras
portion control
about pallet loads purifying tablets dried fish
Individual Meal Pack
Instant Meal Individual
Jungle Ration
Main Battle Tank Ration
Meal Ready to Eat
One Man Compo Pack Ration
One Person Pack
a plastic spoon wrapped in a napkin
Operational Ration Pack General Purpose
Patrol Ration One Man
Self-Defense Portion
lemon/orange powder known as "screech"
Special Forces Ration
Special Fighting Ration
you're hungry or maybe you're not hungry maybe you're just
irritable
Survival Kit
a 400-g can of rice

TWELVE FOIL
PACKETS arranged on
each tray in three rows of
four. *Ration* is a beautiful
word or so the CMO
thinks. Key to a
disciplined life. Latin
ratio "reason." Rationality.
Principle of order. A
prescribed amount at a
prescribed time. It's how
you keep animals in line it
works for people too he
says. Please sit.
Gesturing to his guests he
takes the chair at the head
of the table. They sit.
They are clients of his
kingdom and clients like
to be entertained in his
spotless cafeteria. Each
place around the table is
set with an identical
aluminum tray. Sad is
staring at his tray with
unnatural focus. 4NO
leans toward him.
Nostalgia Sad? Those
unforgettable MREs?
Don't eat the Lucky
Charms! He laughs
horribly. Sad looks at him
with eyes gone inside out
and heaves to his feet
toppling his chair. Exits.
Is there a problem? says

the CMO tearing open the perforated corner of a packet of mackerel in olive oil. Too much memory is the problem says 4NO. We had to look at a fuck of a lot of these little foil packets in the army. Weird you got 'em here too. Don't bother me anymore. Course I never ate the Lucky Charms. Horrible laugh.

ATE THE LUCKY Charms what does that mean? says G. Means don't fuck with outcomes says 4NO. Means a meal ration in the army always has a pack of Lucky Charms. Nobody ever ate 'em. Obvious reason. Except one day Sad decides he don't need lucky he has charms of his own and charm to spare. He ate his. What happened? says G. Well that my boy you'll have to get from the superhero himself. Ain't my give. The CMO is tucking into his oat biscuit and cherry puree. Words can kill he says with his mouth full. Look at Oedipus. G looks at the CMO. You're saying Lucky Charms carry an ancestral curse. The CMO wipes his lips with a napkin. I'm saying if the army is issuing your Luck in the form of Charms it's already gone. 4NO hoots once and gets up from the table. You gentlemen are wading too deep for me this evening I'm out. He takes his tray

and goes. So you let
people eat in their room
says G. No actually not
says the CMO. Smiles.
I'll have to remind him.
He's a patient right says G
but you treat him special.
The CMO is studying his
strawberry beverage
packet. Let's say 4NO has
a need to break rules. Of
course he wouldn't put it
that way he'd say he sees
an aberrant future where
that particular rule is not
in force. So you don't
believe in his prophetic
ability says G. The CMO
taps the packet against his
cheek. Do I think his
brain chemistry is unusual
yes. Do I credit the *all
white all the time*
visionary stuff no that's a
dodge. What's he dodging
says G. Same thing as
your friend the superhero.
Those pesky traumatic
memories. Each of the
CMO's eyes has a very
still black center. But you
don't know much about
that do you? he says. No
says G not much. That's
good then says the CMO.
He is smoothing his empty

foil packets and
organizing them into two
stacks on his tray. Shall
we go find SBG? He is
rising from the table.
You're the only one who
calls him that you know
says G. Acronyms appeal
to me says the CMO.
Name rations says G. The
CMO pauses. Clever.
Yes. Name rations.
Perhaps I will like you
after all.

UP ALL NIGHT feels like
a chewed butt. Chairs
make him nervous. Knots
himself about the room.
What jabs in and out of his
periphery. *Your movements
upset me* no one hears.
Closes his eyes. Who is
that yelling. Opens a slit.
Rec room is empty except
for 4NO with arms held
wide. *Behold I am
Prometheus! O roaring
universe that aches and
sings! You see me suffer at
the hands of gods and I a
god!* 4NO is practicing his
play. Sad now against a
wall he can't remember
leaning on. *Bang bang* no
one hears. Sleeps tilt inside
him all the old stale unslept
sleeps of all the years since
he looked and he was lost.
Lie still at night he could
not he cannot. Every flap
to be peered under every
crevice to be crept into
every chustling memory
there they go like
clockroaches. Memory tore
at his father in him and he
weeps in a sort of fury
turning to the wall he
cannot bear people saying
this (a sort of fury) people

have no idea. What things
are like for him physical
things this blacker and
blacker spiral down it goes.
His looks are gone.
Strength broken. He hates
pity. A current of blacker
flows through him.
Impairment and he lie
down on the floor. Arms
throw themselves over
himself. Prometheus is still
addressing the universe
*Where are your eyes?
What is your justice? You
see me gripping this frayed
rope-end of pain for the last
ten thousand years! Who
will free me finally?* Sad
goes blank. Later the floor
straightens and hardens
around him. Eyes open.
But they are breakable. He
will not move them. *My
heart is like a singing bird.*
Does he say this. 4NO has
crossed the room and is
standing above him. Get
your head out of your butt
4NO says nudging a boot.
Sad views him upside
down. *Whose nest is in a
water'd shoot* no one hears.
He staggers upright. 4NO
starts to hum. They waltz.

MEN WALTZ
ELLIPSOIDALLY like balloons G thinks. He is watching from the doorway. Eighteenth-century balloons. He'd gone to an academic dinner (academic boyfriend) once. Cretan archaeology (left) and eighteenth-century balloons (right) the two ancient ladies he was seated between. He paddled the blues of Knossos during the soup course then turned with the haddock to the best part of ballooning is watching your own shadow race over the ground below. Yes! as a winged person he knew the racing self its aureole of mysterious light gathered from dictionaries we no longer use its strange little pathos way down there. She (right) was soon grinning with all her battered teeth and sailing on (past haddock) to "splash and dash" technique also called "flathatting" she ruffled his nape as if they both were boys. Your custard is cooling said Knossos (left). A roar of gravel in the driveway jolts

G from reverie. He glances to the window. Here's Ida climbing from the back of a taxi and the CMO after her. Up the surprised front steps. Her plaid sportscoat looking not so fresh. Dread skips into G. If Ida is here who's looking after the herd?

WIFE OF BRAIN

great illness makes great doctors or so
the CMO tells us
having
waited years for his Warhol
in a clinic full of Valerie
Solanases then a night of deep snow
brought an admit
for
4NO whose theories however balmy are a welcome
change from the reductionist voodooos of psychotherapy that
are a CMO's
bounden duty usually now
watch everyone's mood become quite lopsided
as the spark struck
by Ida flares into doom
provoking
dissension on that old tragic question who are we at the whim
of (whom?) whom
hums the tune

HE KNOWS HER cunning she knows him hungry. He calls
himself the CMO she calls
him Pig Doc. Tell me Pig
Doc she says why I'm
always stealing. Because
it's the opposite of *feeling*
he says. She grins. Silly
rhymers. Rhymes don't
cure you. Yet it pierces
her grid so she closes the
grid with others of her
own bad deal get real
cucumber peel as he goes
on. To *feel* anything
deranges you. To be seen
feeling anything strips you
naked. In the grip of it
pleasure or pain doesn't
matter. You think what
will they do what new
power will they acquire *if*
they see me naked like
this. If they see you
feeling. You have no idea
what. It's not about *them*.
To be seen *is* the penalty.
You shame victim after
victim they are all *you*.
Nature is on the *inside*.
He sees her looking at the
print on the wall behind
his desk and switches to
Cézanne how naked the
apples got in his hands.
Saucy jake says Ida.
Naked naked naked all

you ever say. The doctor is pleased. He's drawn her out he's done a bit of educating he's inserted a few innuendos and this only their second session! Ida is pleased. Her grid intact. Smart grid. Safe lovely shadows chase themselves brainacross in the thin particular light she keeps there. Home light. Watch that grid. You'll tell me if there is anything you need says Pig Doc. His hunger like a smell on him she turns her head away. But here is the holiness of mastery that was taught her by her father. It is to treat your enemy as an honored guest. Get me some paper I'll draw you some naked she says. You want naked. Pig Doc blushes. Their time is up. Exit Ida. *Pursue Cézanne* he notes in his dossier.

LOOKING GOOD IDA / sarcastic don't help / you
abandoned my herd / I
missed you Gerry now
you fussing at me already
/

don't call me Gerry / listen it was here or jail / you
got arrested / you could
say / how / hit up a
laundromat / shit Ida / was
okay except a few details /
details / off-duty cop
happens to be doing his
laundry

/ cop / grabs my gun throws it in the dryer / gun /
where it melted / your gun
melted / was plastic / I'm
picturing this / I found it
under the overpass
anyway here's the thing /
I'm listening / attempted
armed

robbery could be jailbars for Ida so Ida puts on her
thinking cap / you made a
deal / deal what deal
what's Ida put up in a deal
/ good question / no I did a
bit of bipolar / you faked
psychosis / bluedog
blackbile hissy

fit I did yes I went down the checklist / this was in
the courtroom / backseat

/ what backseat / backseat
of the

cop car where the cop's dryhumping me on the way
to the station / shit Ida /
and since I knew you guys

is here / back up now just first tell me what about the
herd / M'hek got 'em / who
/ Lieutenant M'hek that
guy

from Sad's unit / you gave my herd to a total stranger
/ M'hek can handle it / Ida
tell me this isn't true / quit

hollering / I'm not hollering / your head's on fire / so
what happens next / eyes
pop out eyebrows sizzle
off / I mean with the herd /
M'hek'll phone you
tomorrow the next day /
oh fine / Gerry I done my
best in a difficult situation
/ I can't believe you gave
my herd away difficult
situation shit! and what do
you mean you knew we
were here nobody knew
we were here / so how's
Sad / it was pure

chance we came here nobody knew / but how is he
really / can't believe
you're frolicking in
laundromats while my

herd goes to total strangers
/ what's a hole made of
Gerr / is this a riddle

/ no / itself a hole's made of itself / I think so too /
and don't call me Gerr /
got it

THE LONG BODY is always a surprise. The actual touching neither a positive nor a negative experience they each would admit but no one does. A new tract of nature is open. No one wants to set foot first. So after sex they talk about the weather up north which they dislike and exchange advice. Sad tells her how to get traction on glare ice (pour Javex down your tires) she tells him how to find a sunk dead body in a lake or river (float a loaf of bread down the current). Loaf of bread will stop over the body she says. Meanwhile in another room of the clinic G is dreaming of Daniil Kharms. They are driving along in a paper car. G has a big roll of newsprint which he is cutting into stretches of road and leaning out to toss them in front of the car. This is hard to do from the passenger seat and Daniil Kharms has to keep swerving the car to stay on

the road. Is he getting fed up? G worries. Daniil Kharms turns to him. Cut me an incognito he says. G goes white with shame. He hadn't even thought of this! Daniil Kharms could have been saved! He sits up suddenly drenched in ringing. Phone.

HELLO Hello M'hek here / don't you ever sleep /
herd report / what's wrong
with the herd / nothing
wrong with the

herd / you sure / absolutely / everyone eating / eating
well / everyone shitting /
shitting well / no parasites
/

no sign of a parasite / how's the mood / Io is sad / but
coping / coping well / this
is better than I expected /

M'hek is efficient in small matters / I owe you M'hek
/ new topic / go ahead /
our mutual friend the
Sergeant Sad /

yes / supposed to be calling in every 72 hours / ah /
we suggest he rectify / I'll
pass it along / our faith is
in you

/ he's a mess these days / cannot discuss / he's
drinking again / how about
a proverb / shoot / if the
reverse side

has no reverse side keep eyes front / too late for that
one / do your best /
goodnight Lieutenant /
over and out

A CERTAIN CLICK of
certain doors in certain
corridors. The Laundry
Room door. Certain
midnights. It is directly
underneath the room
where he sleeps or doesn't.
Rigid in the bed he bites
down on the sound. On
the gap after. His ears
tangle in it. Sexual
jealousy? Not exactly.
But comparison is
involved. Comparison
makes you less interesting
to yourself doesn't it.
Your magic contracts your
body putting forth no frill
under another's gaze. Ida
wears the frill now. He
wonders how Ida finds
Sad as a lover. He
wonders if she lies
watching moonlight ease
its way among the
washing tubs the hampers
the gallons of bleach lined
up on the shelf. Men fall
asleep straight after sex
and girls get used to it. G
never did. The moonlit
ironing boards
grandstanding like steeds.

NO MOON TONIGHT in fact. Ida is watching the room itself. It looks lonely a room needs its work. Once as a child she'd stayed in a department store overnight just to see. She stole nothing. She wanted to understand the way it was with no one watching. She'd brought her drawing book but found it hard to do anything in the dark. She sucks her fingers. His smoky aftertaste. What was it like? he asked after the first sex. Like pie without a fork she said. He smiled. I know about the fork he said. That was their closest moment. It inspired her to step past fear. To believe she had got outside the circle of her mistakes. But then he said you know Ida I'm a man who doesn't like the idea of being liked too much and another night he said love was a big bunch of grass that grows up in your mind and makes you stupid. So much for pie. She leans on her elbow watching Sad and wishing she had her drawing book

with her. They are lying on a pile of mattress covers on the floor in weak light from somewhere a night that could so easily not exist. Drawings of Sad so far are minimal. She'd looked at the photos in his wallet and copied one of his father taken the day he dropped his eyeglasses down the well. In the photo he looks younger than Sad is now this father who refused to get another pair of glasses because *I was already seeing too much*. Ida wants to meet the father. Sad is making groaning sounds in his sleep. She touches him. Night's bones are still forming. They get up stiffly and crowd into their clothes and grope across to the big door. Slip out. There against the wall of the corridor sits G with his knees up. Howdy says G.

THINKING ABOUT
PROUST to pass the time.
What a scamp that Proust.
That Albertine. Does
anyone really believe the
girl stays asleep for four
pages in volume V while
Marcel roams around her
prostrate form and
stretches out beside it on
the bed. He touches her
lips strokes her cheek
presses his leg to her leg
then spends a long time
staring at the kimono
flung on a chair with all
her letters in the inside
pocket. *Albertine*
continuait de dormir. He
says he likes her better
asleep because she loses
her humanity and is just a
plant. A sleep plant that
cannot tell him lies or
escape his knowing. Poor
Marcel. What is there to
know.

WITH RED PENCIL G
had underlined the
sentence where Proust
observes the momentarily
impaired surface of the
eye of a person who has
just had a thought she will
not tell you. It traces a
fissure in the pupil and
disappears back down its
own involuntary depths.
Watch the wake.

LIES WHITE LIES half-
lies combinations of lies
degrees of improbability
that lead up to and away
from an outright lie these
layer themselves in the
archaeology of Albertine's
answers to simple
questions. *L'après-midi*
d'Albertine this lost city
whose smashed clues and
indecipherable evidence
poor Marcel has to dig
through each evening
feverish for a real shard.
How was your day? this
question on which so much
hangs. You don't really
want to know. Yet he
keeps digging. G could
never bear to watch Sad
sleep.

YOU LOOK THIN
you losing weight?
says Sad to G and
starts to cry. The
Laundry Room door
closes gravely behind
him. G had a thousand
things to say but they
vanish. Let's keep it
quiet whispers Ida.
They stare at one
another all three of
them wanting to grasp
this moment where
they are crowded like
frozen travelers
around a stove.
Wanting (a tiny
burnished world and
for a moment they
glimpse it. Sad turns
away.

ORGANIZE HE SAYS
swaying off down the
corridor. Organize my
life. G sinks his head
onto his knees. Ida studies
the corridor. Dark matter
she thinks. Telescopes
can't focus it scientists
can't say what it is but it
weighs more than
everything we see put
together. She heard a dark
matter expert on the radio
one day now it makes
sense. The corridor is full
of it. She sits down
beside G.

A SALMON ANSWERS
Ida when G asks. Some
conversations are not
about what they're about.
The word *conversation*
means "turn together."
Turn a salmon turn home
turn Prometheus a hopeful
god. Turn organize his
life! Do not turn betrayal
not kiss. Night bones.
Day sleeper. Girl. Not
stark naked not stark
itself. What do you want
to be in your next life. A
salmon. Why. A rescue.
How. A play. Whose. A
reading. When. A Friday.
No. Is that why they call
it the Rec room.

DO NOT TURN his
photographs he had them
out the other day spread
all over the floor I said
who cut out the faces. He
said I can't sleep I can't
remember what to think
about when I'm sleeping I
said why think just sleep.
He said I found her bloody
eyeglasses in the grass
after nothing else was left
not even. Not even what I
said. Not even the
stupidfuck white plastic
shopping nothing her
family could. Bury
identify keep turn. One
lens smashed the other.
Why cut I said he said
they needed more shadow.
Okay. The other
okay. The other
okay.

WIFE OF BRAIN

tears differ you know
some
people cry in the wind
others in sorrow
emotional tears having
in them high
concentrations of
manganese which irritant
tears lack all those bowls
of secret milk he weeps
easily we
simply note this oh
his Dad had hopes a little
warplay
might straighten stiffen
darken whatever
that yelp of his
to something like
backbone but watch him
go crawling
plank to plank
and the big Zeus eye
drilling his every noon
hello torn soul is too
easy to say here's the
picture he falls through the
picture eventually
he
has to climb back up
it is the Climbing that exists

ITS ENTIRE FUTURE
jumps into his eyes.
Rooms always startle him.
Doorways. The
bronzeclad heroes of
Homer had a better idea.
To stand in time with your
back to the future your
face to the past what a
relief it would be 4NO
thinks. Homer doesn't
mean that literally says the
CMO whenever they talk
about this. Two prep
school boys quibbling
over Homer except 4NO
often ends up calling the
CMO a 10-gallon asshat.
This plays well on TV.
Originally he agreed to do
the talk shows to please
the CMO and pay off his
bill at the clinic but has
come to like TV and TV
hosts with their
syncopated eyes and same
questions. What is it like
to be a prophet etc. etc.
Audiences like him too -
tall and scatological and
doesn't care if he makes
sense. He gradually
realized he could just rant.
It was like angry
sleepwalking. But today
things are different.

Today he very much
wants to hear the words of
his play rise and shine in a
roomful of people. He
very much wants to be
awake for this. He will
read all the parts himself
and now elides other
thought. The reading is
scheduled for 5 o'clock.
He begins to set up the
chairs.

CHAIRS BLUE (20) for inmates. Chairs gray (10) for visitors. Chairs reserved (8) for the CMO. Place for Sad to lie down. Pots and pans for the musical accompaniment (Ida's idea) but where are these? He looks around frowning. Enter Ida. Forgot the pots she says and turns to go back. Wait a minute take this. He holds out a big white plastic bag. You know where to go? Kitchen's in the basement past the Laundry Room and down that hall. Get everything they'll let you have he says. Exit Ida. 4NO closes his eyes. Elides the jab of worry. Starts doing his stretches.

IDA IN THAT doorway is a moment many will be changed by but she doesn't return to the doorway for a long time. What is it about basements. Ida often gets lost in basements well in fact Ida often gets lost. Despite map or compass. Spaces change shape on her nothing matches chunks fall out the back of a real day. *You'll Never Be Lost Again: The Complete Guide to Improving Your Sense of Direction* a book on sale in supermarkets was helpful through Chapter 1 ("You Are Here") and Chapter 2 ("Tools and Attitude") but turned frightening in Chapter 3 which posed the question Why does a mirror reverse your image from L to R but not top to bottom? not front to back? Approaching mirrors sideways she would hope and not hope to surprise the back of her head. Studying *You'll Never's* diagrams made a sensible crease not quite a pain in

her brain. Chapter 4 ("Mental Rotation of a Three Dimensional Object") featured small black & white sketches of bricks piled in unlikely ways and labeled A, B, C. They were the tidiest of drawings. She stared hard at them and felt more and more wrong. Something bleak about the bricks reminded her of Christmas at home. She put the book away. So when 4NO gives her the plastic bag and she turns from the doorway her nerves are already tingling. On her way to the kitchen she cleverly follows a guy going down and arrives without thinking as fast as a hole dug in sand. *Without thinking* was a key error she realizes as she starts back. *You'll Never* had emphasized being observant on the outbound journey. Also take your time and do not panic. Also bring neon zip ties and tie them to branches high up. She shifts the plastic bag now

heavy with pots and pans to her other hand. Corridors branch dimly around her. The familiar Laundry Room nowhere in sight.

I AM VERY he says tilting into the room and stops. Happy to see you man but I'm not sure you're real. Tell me you're real. 4NO looks at him upside down then unfolds from his headstand. Bad night? says 4NO. But Sad is straying about the room touching all the chairs one by one. Chairs he says. I missed you. His voice is soft. His eyes drift off. 4NO watches him fragilely. Every molecule of Sad and Sad's bad future is advancing through 4NO's retinal surface. Like perfect works of art they form a sparkling flood. They saturate him and confiscate the present moment. He closes his eyes against this unbearable excess and gathers his mind to a point. It breaks through the white. He opens his eyes. At ease soldier he says to Sad. Nobody's here yet. I'm just stretching. Sad smiles and then forgets not to. The smile stays on his face.

JUST HOT MILK on the curb here Ida says Ida. Let's move. She hoists the plastic bag and sets off in some direction. Takes a corner. Keeps going. Down a long hall. Through a swing door. Round another bend. Reckless now. Skin electric. This takes centuries. All of a sudden there is a man in a silver tuxedo ahead of her walking rather fast. A smell of fresh wind or laundry in his wake. She calls out speeds up. He has a tight intent motion like a bail bondsman hurrying to court. They round a corner together. Go up some stairs. Is he familiar? His silver tux gives off a sheen in the cellar dusk. He is not slowing down. Centuries. Ida feels a rise of irritation and is about to call out again when they take a last turn he vanishes. She has arrived in the open doorway of the Rec room and her bag of utensils slams her leg as she comes

to a halt. The room is full
of people who turn to her.

A STARTLED STICK in
a plaid sportscoat is what
some see. Ida in the
doorway. Others confused
by the plastic bag think of
groceries and miss their
life at home. A few
assume the play has
started and this is the
protagonist. The CMO
fails to see her at all he is
shaking hands most of the
donors busy with their
phones don't look up. The
woman who suffers from
dementia and whose habit
is to repeat the words
Away Away Away
unceasingly ceases. The
man who trembles and
cannot close his eyelids all
the way even at night says
What a charmer in tones
of pure delight because he
hasn't slept for years and
this alters your reaction to
simple sights. The
trembling man will be
important for Sad who at
this moment is staring at
Ida and seeing the most
grievous day of his life
rematerialize before him
nor will it come one more
grievous the wave of war

bearing him along the
sound of his rounds going
out trigger breaking crisp
in his finger.

THAT BLACK PERIPHERAL motion is Sad hurtling past
4NO toward Ida and
would have knocked her
flat and broke her bones
had the trembling man not
launched himself in
between just in time. The
room falls apart. Ida still
upright her pots and pans
flying. People yell and
run. *Away Away Away*
starts up again on a panic
note. It's that white plastic
bag (4NO to himself) why
didn't I think. Why didn't
I think.

ONCE UPON A time
(according to myth) each
person was born with an
exact knowledge of the
day and hour of their own
death. Poor souls could
think of nothing else.
They lived breathless with
terror. Then Prometheus
arrived bringing with him
the amazing gift that is the
subject of 4NO's play. A
roomful of people ready
for *Prometheus* now gaze
astonished at the
trembling man tackling
Sad in the doorway even
as Ida bursts into song.

chorus
should we discuss your
philanthropy
prometheus
I went a bit too far
chorus
how do you mean

prometheus
I stopped them seeing death before them
chorus
who
prometheus
human beings
chorus
how

prometheus
I planted blind hope in their hearts
chorus
why

prometheus
they were breaking
chorus
you fool

from 4NO's *Prometheus
Rebound*

WHAT IS A culture? A culture is what approves or disapproves of the actions in its midst. Yet how rare for approval to be unanimous. Ida's instinct to sing is right on the money. She ionizes the room as a Taoist rainmaker raises his voice to the clouds at the very moment the dragons come charging out. All sing. Patients sing. Nurses sing. Kitchen staff sings. Even the donors sing. Numb normal vanishes. Hopes float free – macaroni for supper let the catheter not slip true love new meds play the cello again –

AND YET HOPE turns out to be let's face it mostly delusion a word derived from Latin *ludere* meaning "to play a game with oneself or with others" or so the CMO finds himself explaining at the press conference next day amid a long obfuscating response to the reporter's question How did the riot get started? It was a misunderstanding he finally sums up. Was the vet holding a gun? No he was just playing around. But someone got hurt? One of our elderly patients struck his head falling. You killed a patient? He was already frail it may have been a seizure an autopsy is scheduled. And the woman? Ida is fine. The video clip you authorize that? know the chiclet could sing? know she could kick? Here the CMO withdraws from comment. A video clip of Ida in the doorway leading the whole room in song is indeed circulating in local and nonlocal media outlets. But those minutes

of fame bring Ida little joy. Her main memory of the doorway is Sad lunging up from the floor to come at her with murder in his black eyes. Sad full of hate. Sad as a stranger. She kickboxed him flat and kept singing.

PLOWING CAN BE brutal. So too hauling. Io prefers ambling. Ahead of the herd at her usual pace in her usual leadership role on their usual way to summer pasture. Not summer yet but here they go. That's not usual. M'hek walks slightly behind her. He's not usual. The wind is from the north. Usual. Her head itches. Usual. She stops and lowers her head to scrape one horn against a patch of gorse. The gorse smells interesting. She bites off some and stands a while working it against her mostly toothless upper jaw. Especially pungent this gorse. It is half-fermented and will cause her mild hallucinations all the rest of the day. Or perhaps not so mild.

WIFE OF BRAIN

what is the difference between
poetry and prose you know the old analogies prose
is a house poetry a man in flames running
quite fast through it

or

when it meets the mind waves appear (poetry) or
both are defined by
length of lines *and there are times*
your life gets like that whispers

Ida gets like

what? says the news anchor
leaning to peer in Ida's telegenic face but Ida
says nothing like Andy
(speaking of telegenic)

Warhol she's

fool with

letting TV take her for a liar

or a

fool

YOU WANT TRUTH you
get it from somebody who
wore the shoe Ida says to
the blond TV anchor who
comes poking the day
after the riot! *Riot!* being
the TV word for what
happened in the Rec room
that day instead of 4NO's
play. Tears pour in Ida's
heart but not her eyes as
she sits calmly answering
questions about daily life
at the clinic. The TV
person is rather out of
breath. How to draw that.

THEY ESCAPE SAME night with Sad in a suicide suit they can't untie so they bundle him into the car as such. No one has much to say. The road glows whitish blue. Behind them the glacier diminishes. Close to dawn 4NO driving. Do you know the way? says G from the backseat. Let's say I can see us getting there says 4NO. That's not the same thing is it? You want to drive you can drive. G retreats into silence. They are speeding along the seacoast. The sea has a paralyzed black sheen. Now and again Sad collapses forward in a narcotic heap G shoves him back onto the cushions. Who are these transparent people? Sad wonders then sleeps again. Ida in the front passenger seat does not turn around.

LAI D HIS SNOUT on her. Cold and wet and sliding it keeps replaying in her mind. Their final session. He made clear her usefulness to him. Her future as a clinic celebrity. A series of mini-documentaries a producer a brand name. His snout on her wrist the purposiveness the wet cold slidingness of it or was it a sort of oblivion in him made her pivot and let fly a kick to his windpipe that knocked him out the door of his office and down the hall despite the awkward angle. How satisfactorily it bookended the kick to Sad's throat that began this little event horizon. But now she feels a bit lost. Her father taught her to kick when she was ten. What would he think of her current trend? Would he give her his *Ida don't be glad of yourself* look? He'd died by mistake when they took him to the ER for measles and some distracted doctor put him in a room with a scarlet fever. You got a

technicality there *you*
could sue those fuckers
blind so people said to Ida
and her mother at the
funeral but who had the
heart. She tries to
remember his low voice.
When they practiced
together he could adjust
her form with the slightest
nudge. How about this?
he'd so quietly murmur
moving her elbow a
centimeter to the left and
the energy shot down her
arm like lightning. She
can feel the shapes of it
still in her body and her
timing. How sweet if she
could hear his voice again
just once. But something
is catching at the corner of
her eye. Glances out the
window sees a man in a
silver tuxedo loping
alongside the car with his
eyes intent on the horizon
and a shine around him
like washed air. She rolls
down the window. A
bright smell streams into
the car. Doesn't she know
this man? She puts this
away to think later and
leans her head out. Need
a lift?

WHERE YOU headed /
bit further along the road /
why

you running / oh I often do
/ are you

meeting someone / yes
/ who / a stranger / how
will

you recognize each other /
in a strange way / strange

to both of you / that

would have been a
problem / it's no longer a
problem / no

WITH HERMES IN the car everything changes. They don't know it is Hermes. Don't know they are headed for death. Except 4NO in the driver's seat is experiencing an exceptionally high photon count and consequent fatigue of his visual cortex. Sad wakes up. Ida turns around. They smile at each other a smile that dazzles the car. G feels such a stab of envy plus love plus hate he laughs aloud. Then cries What's that red up ahead?

SMILE FROM INSIDE (him) this one jostled alert by G shifting over to make room for the man in the silver tuxedo. The pressure of G along his right side brings a snow of memories cascading all the old joys run up and down his limbs once. A woman whom he does not know is turning to him from the front seat. Her teeth are spectacular. She bares them like a lioness come down to the pool to drink. He has worked his hands free from their restraints and thinks to throttle the lioness. But maybe he does know her. He pauses. Someone is yelling. Sorry he says was that me yelling.

SMILE FROM INSIDE
(her) is pure bravura.

WIFE OF BRAIN

don't say you weren't
expecting a volcano those
red wings
that not even bad love can
tame
must signify something's
somewhere
about to go up in flame or
(as Proust says) be
eternalized in pleasure
like the men
in a Pompeian house of ill
fame yet fame
is not ill
for all
in this tale Sad may be a
goner
but Io's getting ready
for her free
throw
with one eye on the herd
and the other on that
pyroclastic glow

EACH SEED AS he
crushes it in his teeth
shoots a suds of sharp red
cream along his tongue.
M'hek is eating a
pomegranate in the dark.
He avoids its bitter
membrane jacking out the
seeds one by one with the
point of a knife. His beard
and hands are stained. A
thin wild fragrance rises
on the air this interests Io
in a psychedelic way. She
is still high on fermented
gorse and ambles over to
where he sits crosslegged
on the ground. The rest of
the herd is asleep in a
patch of saxifrage. She
studies M'hek and with a
long slow blink of her
deepshaded golden eyes
extends her tongue. No
one can know what
another's ecstasy is and yet
when M'hek wipes four
pomegranate seeds off his
knife blade onto the
blackish groove of Io's
tongue she shivers all
over. Here is a taste for
every bud M'hek thinks.
Io subsides slowly and
gigantically to the ground.
Together they inhale the

first blue of day as it starts
seeping out of hills all
around. Io leans her
horn against M'hek's knee.
A hush carries itself up
her sigh. Late stars watch
them.

LATE STARS WATCH certain others in the same night.

Evacuation procedures are under way at the clinic. Despite various vulcanologists giving him various predictions about timing and direction of lava flow the CMO knows when the bats depart Batcatraz is time to go. First he scours 4NO's room and finds all 4NO's notes for the play and takes them. Ida's room looks clean as a whistle. He ponders this expression while searching her cupboards and mattress. Of course she took her drawing book with her. Nothing clean about a whistle. She came whistling through this late season of his life. He had reached winter without discontent had learned to feel at home in his human costume. Poor lamb what costume could survive Ida. A person without imposture and for all her illegalities an enemy of misrule. A person who extrudes her own soul before her as she goes. Like lava. He laughs

unevenly. The defection of the four of them has not surprised him and he knows he will make use of it somehow. But a large chunk of his gossip life is gone and he needs gossip it keeps him dynamic. He is a person always in motion he needs to be kept vibrating. Between any two activities he plunges. Can't stand to be alone hates quiet time has little interest in introspection let alone other people as individuals. Or rather he doesn't care for people he cares what flows through them. And usually takes it. His teacher at med school called him a minotaur who swallows other people's labyrinths. Good I'll do psychiatry he said.

OTHER PEOPLE'S LABYRINTHS really were tedious as it

turned out. He would have gone back to fixing cars except for 4NO. What a godsend was 4NO with his Promethean pretensions and meaty complaints about *all white all the time*. The man never stopped sparking and changing you could plug your battery into 4NO and run for a year. What is it like to be a prophet? The CMO usually pretends to doubt 4NO's foreknowing but the fact is he does not understand it. Clearly the man lives in a different mental world than other people and the difference is not a matter of predicting who'll win the World Cup. 4NO seems to foresee about five seconds ahead of every instant. Do prophets vary in their amplitude of vision? Maybe Isaiah had an oscillating variable of forty years or a century. Five seconds gives you 4NO. Either way is a mess - you have no present moment not

skinned shaved stained
saturated overrun outraged
by raw data from the
future. Never a moment
of naked eye. 4NO
functions pretty well
considering.

BETTER THAN ISAIAH the CMO thinks. Isaiah was too emotional. 4NO plays his cards close to his chest. It's true he slips into a rant from time to time but in general there's a cool control that the CMO assumes was trained into him in the army. What was the army like for 4NO? He does not seem to be lashed to fury whenever he remembers it (like Sad) although now and again he tells stories that make people simply turn away. And does so with a kind of exasperation as if to say Oh you've a ways to go but soon enough you'd be stomping infant skulls and see the sport of it *you'd get there too*. The CMO looks out the window. A crude black wasteland smell is invading Ida's room. Lava two miles away at a guess. He expedites his search. Makes a minor but puzzling discovery. A wad of fliers from some martial arts academy tied up in rubber bands. He briefly pictures Ida on a

streetcorner pressing
leaflets into passing hands.
Rejects the picture. Takes
the fliers anyway. You
could never learn enough
about Ida.

IO IS AWARE of the volcano well before M'hek. She lifts her head and looks back at the herd. It is shambling to its feet. Eyes gone black and absolute. Sweat sour as a schizophrenic. M'hek decides they should move out. The herd is averse it balks and drifts. Io cooperates doubtfully. Finally they set off. About a half mile up the road they arrive at a cliff edge and all simply stop. M'hek looks down.

SPARKLING ALONG IN the valley below is a car unaware it is driving directly into the path of the lava flow. M'hek stands transfixed watching a black cloudform advance from the horizon toward the car its molten edge snarling its fiery paws eating steadily at the world ahead. Moving about 40 mph. The herd now breathing like a bellows has formed into a circle facing outward. Io stands apart. She dips her head to her knee momentarily. Blood still buzzing with gorse she does not hesitate to believe that a masterpiece like herself can fly. Should fly. Does fly. Without a sound and by the time M'hek turns around she is aloft.

*Jump
time*

IO IS NAT King Cole soaring into the opening bars of "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire" with some strange gold pepper spicking and spanning her veins and night blossoming out her head like Jim Dandy's desire from an Elvis Presley lyric. Elvis dreamed up love lyrics while he sat on the couch by his mother watching TV. "Chestnuts Roasting" was a Christmas song Nat King Cole wrote one hot summer day in Los Angeles with Mel Tormé beside the pool. Or so I have heard. Facts harbor many incongruities. Here's another. Down below in the valley G has had 4NO stop the car so he can get out and study the black and blacker air. No thought of Nat King Cole or Jim Dandy or chestnuts comes to mind when he glances up to see Io plummeting toward him at the velocity you would expect of a 400-pound object falling through space. Falling is a fact.

Soaring not a fact. But G recognizes all at once how much he loves this animal. He shoots his wings to their fullest expanse and screams once as he leaves the ground.

BETWEEN US AND
animals is a namelessness.
We flail around
generically –
camelopardalis is what
the Romans came up with
for “giraffe” (it looked to
them like a camel crossed
with a leopard) or get the
category wrong – a musk
ox isn’t an ox at all but
more closely cognate with
the goat – and when
choosing to name
individual animals we
pretend they are objects
(Spot) or virtues (Beauty)
or just other selves (Bob).

HOW OR WHAT in their
minds animals call us we
hesitate to think.

PROPER NAMES
PROBABLY not do they
even have pronouns? Do
they experience the entire
cold sorrow acre of human
history as one
undifferentiated lunatic
jabberwocking back and
forth from belligerence to
tender care? G has
thought all this before.
Io's gold eyes shine at him
through the blackness.

BRIGHT CURRENTS
LEAP the air. They come
together surprisingly
gently and shift direction
to a swooping curve that
heads off southward.

Winged man and musk ox
are parts of each other
although not parts of a
whole. G doesn't have
time to wonder as he
works his wings against
the thickening air why Io
is no longer falling
toward him but planing
steadily and horizontally
above his back. She
bellows. Lets loose a
great fart and poops
gloriously just missing his
head. But what is that
other sound? A sort of
succulent mechanical
knocking like a thousand
zippers undoing
themselves. He knows
that sound. He glances
up. All the bats of
Batcatraz are massed in a
moving layer between him
and Io sailing her on. A
grand day is what this is
turning into. From Io's
head and flanks the long
guard hairs stream
backward like lineaments

of an Old Testament prophet. Down in the valley below as 4NO turns the car to go back the way they came everyone looks up at a loud THUNK on the roof.

4NO WAKES TANGLED in the steering wheel of the car. He is alone. All the car doors are open. The front of his visual domain fills at once with mountains in flame crying *More!* The flames go white. He wrenches himself back from this ravaging future with a deep groan. Being prone to sudden dozes he hopes every time to wake as someone else. The word *splash* floats across. Most horrible part of ECT the little splash had the doctors not made certain promises to him he would never. Twelve treatments later awaking no different. He shrugs. Exits the car. The clinic stands deserted. Black flakes shudder down over it. He sees someone inside running from window to window. The future is already. He cannot win. He cannot help. He cannot change. He gets back in the car and closes his eyes.

FROM SILENT ROOM
to silent room G searches
the clinic. Cupboards
stand ajar streaks mark the
floor a float of dust and
haste and terror just
settling. And at every
window the vague twilight
the black flakes of this
dayless day come sifting
down. He listens and his
hearing drowns in it. Is
he outside inside or inside
outside. He has no
bottom to his mind and
both does and does not
open the note that lies
tossed on his bed. *Call
this number it's your
mother.* Walking down a
hall. Knowing this
moment already. Its bark
split open. Years go by.
Refolding the note.
Walking down another
hall. A glimpse of
something silver. Fear
crams him. The silver
tuxedo which has more
than once been accepted
without question is it he at
the turn of the hall? Who?
Without question. Call
who? But that is not her
number. Place where he
caught his breath. Places.

TIME PASSES TIME
does not pass. Time all
but passes. Time usually
passes. Time passing and
gazing. Time has no gaze.
Time as perseverance.
Time as hunger. Time in
a natural way. Time when
you were six the day a
mountain. Mountain time.
Time I don't remember.
Time for a dog in an alley
caught in the beam of your
flashlight. Time not a
video. Time as paper
folded to look like a
mountain. Time smeared
under the eyes of the
miners as they rattle down
into the mine. Time if you
are bankrupt. Time if you
are Prometheus. Time if
you are all the little tubes
on the roots of a gorse
plant sucking greenish
black moistures up into
new scribbled continents.
Time it takes for the postal
clerk to apply her lipstick
at the back of the post
office before the
supervisor returns. Time
it takes for a cow to tip
over. Time in jail. Time
as overcoats in a closet.
Time for a herd of turkeys

skidding and surprised on
ice. All the time that has
soaked into the walls here.
Time between the little
clicks. Time compared to
the wild fantastic silence
of the stars. Time for the
man at the bus stop
standing on one leg to tie
his shoe. Time taking
Night by the hand and
trotting off down the road.
Time passes oh boy. Time
got the jump on me yes it
did.

HE BRINGS LILACS
from the bush by the
corner of her house to
which she will probably
not return this time. Or
ever and he leans his face
into them. The smell
plunges up. A vertical
smell. Wet purple
unvanquished. Her door
is shut. The ceiling tracks
flicker. *No radios no
barbecues don't honk* a
sign he saw on the way to
the hospital his mind
running like a dog off its
chain. Certain things not
decided have been
decided. He arrived on
the day after her surgery.
Has seen this corridor at
all hours. Notices again a
hesitancy in the light as if
it were trying not to shock
you with how scant it is.
He can hear the oxygen
machine through the door.
It shunts on. Runs awhile.
Shunts off. He enters.

WHEN HE IS there they
lift the stones together.
The stones are her lungs.

A WORD LIKE
rauschenberg that allows
him to not lift his pen
from the paper. To bear
down fundamentally.
Writing itself is what he
loves now the mental
action the physical action.
He thinks about writing all
the time while doing other
things or talking to people
he is forming sentences in
his head it keeps the white
away. He can block the
one stream with the other
and steer around in it like
a swan in reeds around the
headache too which
continues to rain planets
within his forehead. He is
rewriting his play as a
novel given the futility of
theater. The telephone
rings. He waits for it to
stop then places it inside
the drawer of the bedside
table with the motel Bible.
It just fits. He smiles at
this. As a boy he had very
much liked being a
crossing guard but even
more liked the way the
belt folded up. Placing
that neat oblong into his
locker twice a day is his
intensest memory of

school. He closes the drawer. I'd be no fucking use or comfort he said to G when the others set off for the hospital. Death to be close to makes him laugh. He can't help it. He can't explain it. It hurts everyone. *My famous philanthropy* he says with a glassy glance at himself in the mirror of the dark TV.

NOT DEATH NOT smells. Not blood and shit on the floor. *No one should see me like this* is her main worry. So he makes her up and props her up and airs out the room before the others arrive. Here they are Sad and Ida awkwardly about the bed and G near the window. How was the trip she says to no one in particular. Her bed is as big as a speedboat and she a handful of twigs under the sheet. Her eyes are open but the gaze is downward. They all answer at once. Lava. Waterfalls. Beaches. Chattermarks. The wind. The white. The ice. What color are those shoes black or gray? she says musingly. They all pause. Gray Ida says. Got 'em at the outlet mall. Later they show her photos. G is especially proud of a shot of himself on wing amidst a hovering cloud of ice bats. The red and black composition almost operatic. She peers at it. Why did you wear

those glasses? she says.
Still later her supper tray
is brought in. She pushes
some Jell-O to the left
pushes it back. Seems full
of helpless fury. Is
suddenly exhausted. We
should go they say shifting
about for their coats. But
she looks up. Left your
pearls at home today.

HER VOICE THIN
enough to see through.
She has caught him by
surprise he doesn't answer.
Of course he remembers
the pearls. They went
with the lizardskin pants.
It was the year of his
audacity the year he
decided to be *a lion of
himself* not just a bad
influence. Year he
discovered beauty (his
own) and its power.
Lizard pants girlfriends
boyfriends he had acid and
Thunderbird wine and a
battered Karmann Ghia.
His father watched him
come and go without
comment. His mother
kept a nervous smile.
They had one marvelous
afternoon together he and
his mother the summer
before he left home he
cannot now recall why
they decided to drive
along the lakeshore
looking at posh houses
and commenting on their
design. She had sharp
views on design. They
both liked a certain shade
of dark yellow that was
popular on trim. They

both liked glassed-in porches. Disagreed on trees close about the house. All the car windows open and their hair rushing around. He felt like a whole person with her that day. Perhaps it was the car - to sit peacefully side by side and talk or not talk and let time go in and out the windows. At home they all seemed caught in a badly blocked play and faces put on wrong. But now the little mother in the bed is gazing hard at him. How are you really? she says. Bad he says. Do you have help? she says. Some he says. *Get better help* she says with the last of her voice and he almost salutes. Yes ma'am he says and for a minute he believes he will do it. She closes her eyes. G is watching this exchange from near the door. You know the way out? he says to Sad. They exit.

NOT A CASUAL solitude. He and she. Oxygen machine is wheeled in and hooked up. Her eyelids flutter but do not open. He sits. The room is hot. There is a smell. Does Proust have a verb for this. This struggle she faces now her onetime terrible date with Night. First date last date *soulmate*. Old song lyrics scamper in him. He moves the chair back to the window. *She's counting my soulmate gasps of make my heart beat at a fast rate.* Oxygen. He dozes. Waking to her avid gaze. Wide open. She holds in one hand the makeup mirror in the other a pair of tweezers. *Here* she whispers. Lifts tweezers. *Maybe you can do it.* Taps the end of her chin. He hesitates shrugs pulls up his chair takes the makeup mirror and peers close. A beard of very tiny white translucent hairs all over her chin. He moves the oxygen tube aside and gingerly plucks a few. Plucks a few more.

There are hundreds thousands. He hates waiting for her to wince she doesn't wince. It's alright Ma you can hardly see them he says. Her eyes fall. *Okay never mind.* Sadly she takes the tweezers back. *I look awful don't I.* No you look like my Ma. Now she winces. In later years this is the one memory he wishes would go away and not come back. And the reason he cannot bear her dying is not the loss of her (which is the future) but that dying puts the two of them (now) into this nakedness together that is *unforgivable*. They do not forgive it. He turns away. This roaring air in his arms. She is released.

OXEN STAND QUIET under trees. Io's eyes are closed. M'hek is in uniform. Ida had her sportscoat cleaned. It is a hard blowing red evening. The priest speaks about the woman's good life her exemplary son her soul's situation in the palaces of God. A short-notice choir attempts "Ave Maria." The coffin is wheeled out the back door of the church and onto a waiting van someone closes the doors of the van G watches it drive off. And the freedom stuns him. Here it is the promised clearing where great stags are running at liberty. Say a man has been carrying a mother on the front of his life all these years now she is ripped off now his life is light as air - should he believe it?

NEW ADULT NIGHT
floats with face averted at
the edge of town – should
he beckon to it? Is this all
a trick? Will Death
simply stroll away amused
that an intimate event
(breath) should be
mistaken for a law
governing all beasts?
Silly! Silly law! Look at
the hours stacked ahead of
you bales of time shining
in the sun – just reach your
arms in she must be there
somewhere maybe at
the kitchen table in the red
velour bathrobe crouched
over her coupons reaching
for her smokes he half
turns back – but there is
only the screen door of the
vestry and a row of trash
cans and a bicycle. Some
big old black crow just
now shuffling itself off
into flight.

SO WHAT TIME'S your
bus / midnight / I'll walk
you to the station / we
could get a slice on the
way / is Ray's open / isn't
Ray's always open / here's
something I wanted to ask
somebody a long time it
always happens to me /
what's that / I walk under a
streetlamp

and it goes dark they just
kind of fizz and go dark / I
get that too / does it mean
anything / I don't know /
where's G / back

at the house / doing
what / sorting stuff / we
could go over / think
he'd rather be alone /
other question / shoot /
d'you like anchovies / no /
want to share a whole pie
then I'm starving / okay /
you know once my Dad
set up a stop-motion
camera on the corner

of our house so we could
see the wind when we're
not there and cats come
and go / sounds like a
brain-on-fire kind of guy

your Dad / oh he was /
reminds

me of something / what /
she would

sing while I was weeping
if I listened she

would cease it's from a
poem / cool beans / did
you say cool beans / yes /
Ida you crack me up / do
I / so is this the 2 for 1 day
at Ray's / I sure hope
so

SHUFFLING RECIPES
COUPONS horoscopes in
a kitchen drawer he turns
up an old B&W
photograph of her posed in
dashing swim costume on
some long ago back porch.
One leg forward like a
Greek *kouros* a cigarette
in the other hand she
glows as a drop of water
glows in sun. She looks
sexually astute in a way
that terrifies him he puts
this aside and all at once
the grainy photograph the
early marvel of her life
flung up at him a thing
hardly believable! knocks
him to his knees. He grips
his arms and weeps. Pain
catches the whole insides
of him and wrings it.
Oddly now remembering
his grandmother's wringer
washer silvergreen and
upright on a platform of
wet boards in her back
kitchen beside the
washing tubs. How
carefully he'd been taught
to feed a piece of dripping
cloth between the two big
lips of the rollers while
she cranked the handle
and the cloth grabbed

forward to emerge on the other side as a weird compressed pane of itself. He hadn't known his grandmother long or well. She smelled of Noxzema. Didn't like doctors. Believed in herbs and the Bible. When the apostles walked down the street she said their shadows would heal people. His mother once told him a story about her dying. They never liked each other hadn't visited for years but someone arranged a phone call. So there they were mother and daughter on the telephone separate cities separate nights both suffering from asthma and so moved they couldn't speak. I heard her breathing I knew what it was his mother said. He looks up. He'd almost forgot about the rain. Unloading on the roof and squandering down the gutters. Rain continuous since the funeral a wrecking rattling bewildering Lethal-knuckling mob of rain. A rain with no instructions.

LISTENING TO RAIN
he thinks how strange all its surfaces sound like they're sliding up. How strange his mother is lying out there in her little soaked Chanel suit. The weeping has been arriving about every seven minutes. In the days to come it will grow less.

WIFE OF BRAIN

Mothers in summer
Mothers in winter
Mothers in autumn
Mothers in spring

Mothers at altitude
Mothers in solitude
Mothers as platitude
Mothers in spring

Mothers banking their shots
Mothers grackling their throats
Mothers dumped from their boats
In spring

Mothers as ice
Or when they are nice
No one more nice
In spring

Mothers ashamed and Ablaze and clear
At the end
As they are
As they almost all are, and then
Mothers don't come around Again
In spring

RAIN HITS EVERY
side of everything. Her
deep blue raiment streams.
Her history hums along
the veins and balanced on
the beam of her. Familiar
by now with the
neckbones of night as they
shift into yet another old
dawn. Familiar to be
suspended in the lives of
others and still not. She
with her unspilled cup of
love her perfect stench her
vague knowledge of them.
Them with their plink and
twang and uncontrollable
shivering their clever
hands their tendency to
torture cats. To threaten to
be threatened is addictive
for them. She has seen a
cat with the pawpads
ripped off. And yet they
wipe one another's tears or
sweat they have good days
they roll in the snow.
Caution is best. Luck
essential. Hope a
question. Down the street
she notices a man in his
yard in his undershirt
standing looking up at the
rain. Well not every day
can be a masterpiece.

This one sails out and out
and out.

Notes

Frontispiece: *Bat* by Ida

“What big cucumbers they sell nowadays . . .” from Daniil Kharms, “What They Sell in Stores Nowadays” in *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms*, trans. Matvei Yankelevich (New York: Ardis Books, 2009) p. 73.

“A peculiar thing happened to me: I suddenly forgot what comes first—7 or 8? . . .” from Daniil Kharms, “Sonnet,” *ibid.*, p. 48.

“If the sky were crooked, that wouldn’t make it any lower . . .” from Daniil Kharms, *The Blue Notebook*, in *Oberiu: An Anthology of Russian Absurdism*, trans. Matvei Yankelevich (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006) p. 126.

*My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a water’d shoot;*
from Christina Rossetti’s poem “A Birthday”

Reference to Proust on the momentarily impaired surface of the eye of a person who has just had a thought she will not tell you, etc., from *Sodome et Gomorrhe* vol. I, (Paris: Flammarion, 1987) p. 189.

*She would sing while I was weeping;
If I listened, she would cease*
from Emily Brontë’s poem “Hope”¹