

To Be Read at the Vietman Memorial, Washington, D.C.



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I.

I asked my girlfriend to kill me today. I exposed my panting breast. I gave her my 45. With a swab of iodine I painted an X above my heart. She was, of course, beautiful as she contemplated my death. I knelt before her on the floor. She rolled a cherry lozenge on her tongue. Her perfumed hair hung down. “You are brave, son of Farquar,” she said, “grandson of the warriors of W.W.II, I would honor you if I could.” She curtsied and handed back the gun.

The afternoon became the evening and the evening became the night. She danced in a pink silk slip, garter belt, nylons and a lacey bra. My nakedness delighted her; we matched scars in agreement. We finished off the Walker as the sun came up over Lake Michigan. “How could I ever kill you,”—she whispered, “you,— my original man?”

II.

I asked my wife to kill me today. I held out my darkening wrists. A rooster stared from a tree. A crow coughed across the empty fields of the rust belt. I handed her the kitchen knife. She licked the serrate edge with her tongue, then blinked long eyes and coyly whispered, “Once there were two lovers. The man had a little penis, but he served with great distinction in Vietnam. The woman faked her passion: she lifted her ankles high and thought of midwives and Austerlitz. Mirrors on every wall grew cloudy with their occasional heat. The woman became an artist and built a phallic

tower to universal applause. Her lover grew distraught because she strove with no one in all public strife while he struggled in a dilating ring. He eased himself into an imaginary space and looked up at the sound of high hat and drum: a jazz orchestra had come to Mayberry and his lover was doing the razzmatazz back stage with the horn section as God's punishment for American foreign policy. She froze a single drop of bottled water as an after-thought and carved the Mater Dolorosa in its side. He mounted it in a bell and rang it down the fox holes in his jungle dreams."

The knife tumbled from the midst of an inward-turning theory first formulated by a blind man in a parallel dimension, then struck through the silence between these words of farewell. Struck through the interstices between the felloes of the wheels as they clattered down the National Pike. Struck through the quaver between gongs; struck through its shadow on the tongue and groove floor. Struck—vibrating—seven inches of milled steel—which twanged with a Berliozian fervor. "How could I ever kill you?" my wife whispered as the music swelled. But she did.

III.

This hand washing the wasted neck

dragging a silk scarf over the long muscles,
passing the scarf over and between the thighs.

This hand moving among the speckled limbs
positioning the parts
counting the parts

numbering and cataloguing the many parts
that once knew duration, extension, division

This hand diving down into the lungs

to drag forth the blackest flower:

flower of brutal oaths
flower of hemorrhagic coughs
flower of smudgepot ashes
each pistil a dusty socket
each petal a vortex of soot

This hand stilling the fabled mark
active as a centipede on the brow.