

PROBLEM

Yellow eyes
in a blue house
on cinderblocks.
Scrawny kids
from down the lane
throwing sticks at
stray dogs.
My father, car-less,
jobless, on his
mother's porch
smoking in circles.
His license says brown
but they are a yellow
like burning pine.
My mother says
she never loved
anyone.
My father says
she hexed him.
In the depth
of his crack use,
coming in and out
of the bathroom,
he spoke to me
of curses. It was years
before I understood
the stench.
When he spoke
of mother,
of our family,
it was with his arms
out front, flailing.
The way even the ones
who swim out to drown
still fight.

WHAT IS LEFT OF MY GRANDFATHER

A single photograph, color, from '65,

 He's in brown slacks
and a dirty white button up

 slouched forward
on the couch with his arms
propped against his thighs,
his long legs stretching out.

I sit the same way; I'm built the same way.

 No one says if he's drunk or not.
No one remembers.

BROTHER

Your gym sweats, your dip can, the sudden musk of sex
in our old bedroom. I remember these more vivid
than the words you've said, than our exchange
of wrongs. In a dream you're healthy, thin, standing naked
in the kitchen by the sink. And then, you expand--
freckled skin stretching to cover more and more of you.
I hear the bone hit bone in your knees, the cascading
crack and pop of your spine. Like thunder, like rifle fire.
What I know now of work, of strength and weakness,
is who you are. Tired from the grave shift, you lay
shirtless on the couch. A game is on. (I picture us
ten years ago: the two hand touch, the pitch and catch)
I love you I tell you and I should say it again,
I should say what I know now of silence and suffering,
of second guessing, *is* you. Watching as your hours
were cut, then your mortgage went under. How first
your engagement broke, then your hours came back.
Have you felt me? Behind you, ready to analyze?
I ask, *how is work?* You spit in your dip cup.
I hear the announcer say, exasperated:
there are only so many chances.