

north of nowhere

illinois still annoys me

ten years spent changing shape, bent and beaten back
the moment my body crossed the border

knots thought untied retightened, screws assumed secure shook loose
thoughts thought jettisoned and at last long lost
waiting to welcome my return

the same sticky ruts remain, ready to suck you in
steep, deep, and dark as they've ever been
old habits hardly die, take no time to relearn

here we are and on we go, the ennui shows, the lawn needs mowed
the beer flows, the fears grow, tears sow one more year closed

deeper into nowhere

the middle of autumn
a world of mud
a boy wanders the fields
around another new home

the sky is overcast
shadows casting shadows
he feels like the only human
for miles--which is true

but for once
fear keeps its fingers
off the back of his neck
and something pulls him forward

farther from home
deeper into nowhere
he doesn't see the hole
until he's standing at its lip

he stares into the earthy maw
the air moves silently over his skin
sucked slowly down into the dark
the open throat of the world

roots jut and twist
hang and tangle from every side
slowly, maybe, surely not
he thinks they're turning towards him

a noise
a gasp, a gurgle
a low grown
pleading and hungry

as far down as he can see
the point where light
can no longer survive
the dark is churning

filling with faces
somehow familiar
there's no longer
any doubt

the roots are reaching up for him
some have grown hands
most have turned to bones
the air is rushing down the hole

its lips begins to quiver

private jack

two wounded kids taking hands
desperate to escape their escape

the closer we held each other
the colder we grew

it's gone, she said, facing the wall
a body beneath a sheet

whispering: where do i go
when the sun sets

he called her Elizabeth, she preferred Charity
her uniform said Jack, our first conversation:

"jack o'lantern" "jack knife" "jack boots" "jack be nimble" "one-eyed jack"
"jack of all trades" "jumping jack flash" "jack sprat" "jack shit" "jack mehoff"

she laughed into her beer, he chased shots of hate
with thoughts of murder, i sang her second favorite song

i watched them walk away, two wounded kids
her hair in his fist, his throat between her teeth

i had recently jumped from a heaven bound ship
terrified by the prospect of paradise

she was strapped to the mast of a vessel
she could see the rats abandoning even as she climbed aboard

he whipped her raw, she pressed him towards
the end of the plank, then they traded places

the ocean rose around us, waves of wine and whisky and rum
leaving us ragged and ravaged on the rocks each angry morning

i woke with my head in her lap
her tears falling on my eyes

she kissed me, her breath bitter
her tongue a tangle of rusty barbed wire

a kiss that cut, the comfort of a
cradle falling, hell breaking loose

she broke his guitar, he broke her nose
we thought things were settled

we did what the young, the hunted
and haunted are made to do

we built a raft out of our bodies, set out
on a sea of skin, sailing through soul and skull

searching for a way to fuck ourselves
beyond the limits of the physical

until: wounds licked, bones set and poison sucked
exorcisms performed, she said, it's gone

wrapped like a straightjacket
in the arms of her madman

rings on the appropriate fingers
blood at the corners of their mouths

they looked like two skulls
trying to kiss

we shared our last smile
as they walked past into apocalypse

no place--like home

so much so often means so little
days drag on and years fly by
i'll never get more done
than i did while in the womb and
bad dreams seem
the most likely to come true

those with best feet left unmangled
pointed in the right direction
who seize each chance
for forward putting:
please excuse the envy
accept the awe

but how does one a purpose serve
without submitting
i am receptive to revelation
my mind could not be more open
if i put a shotgun in my mouth
frankly, i'm all fears

once downbuckled, i did my best
to tug on stolen bootstraps
committing most of myself to the mindgrind
lying supine at the mercy of the clocksuckers
pretending it respectable the cloth from which i'm torn
i fought hard against our common woe

sunk of soul and barrenbrain
i've run ten centuries of circles
one big, blind spiral
right back to square one:
flaccid town, bland boulevard
just north of nowhere

no place—like home

what are we alive for--just to be alive more

his twenties spent suspended
if not inanimate
wading through the moments
waiting for the right time
to raise a hand, rise to the occasion
take a breath, fake a fuck

here he has been standing
at the edge of an existence
solid to the touch, hollow to the core
mind made up all pretty and pretend
a ghost floating over his own life
afraid or unable to descend

he thought he'd be dead by now
he thought we'd all be dead by now
a-pocalypse to z-pocalypse
every one a disappointment
the music never swells
the credits never roll