

drown him out

the first thought was obvious
predictable to the point
i'm almost ashamed
it occurred to me, although
i doubt you could have avoided it
had you been there instead

the kid was dead
the doctor spoke german
the nurse mentioned cremation
then the mixing of his ashes
with a month's worth of other buns
who all refused to rise

the color of my wife's eyes
had not been visible
since the tapping of a black nail
against a six foot syringe
as the bubbles floated upward
her pupils did the same

again there's almost shame
i couldn't control the association
i had seen that face before
heard moans so similar
turned her gently over to press my lips
against the place they put the needle

for an hour she lay fetal
my body on the bed behind
while we felt him fade
like a flower shedding petals
i had never seen her fragile
didn't realize she knew how

my body tight against hers now
i've forgotten what color her eyes are
i can't stand the sounds i make her make
those moans so similar
so i moan louder
trying to drown them out

trying to drown him out

the only promise i have kept

empty as ever, nothing to offer
nothing to show for the sacrifice
as if i'd know what would suffice

never satisfied, never sated
a great deluge of tears
to destroy what i've created

hellbent on my salvation
convinced she has been chosen
she determines she must suffer

stands bare but for shackles
beaten while i bear witness to the miracles
she is forced to perform

she walks across the waterbed
she calms the hypomanic storm
she cuts the cola from the rum

she embraces the demons
i have kept well fed
gives them lips to suckle

she lays her body across the altar
i set fire to our apartment
the only promise i have kept

next time it would not be water
we cast lots
dividing memory and furniture

i think i know

i think i know how i found god
why i fell for the promise
filled at first with a peace
until then unknown

it's been about a month
since i limped back onto the prairie
broke and mostly broken
a slew of new wounds to nurse

the old, dull routine was waiting
eager for my fall:
sleep so as to pass the time
try shutting down the mind

pacify the
hurt
go
inert

the days drag on and
your eyes glaze over and
the simplest of stimuli
warrants entry in your diary:

today i drank six cups of coffee
smoke two stolen packs
saw a girl i used to kiss
jerked off twice into the same sock

you'd think living here i'd have learned
to appreciate these little things and
leave the bigger to the better paid
alas no dice

i remain the same creature of extremes
i was when i escaped
either stoking fires in the pit or
tap dancing through paradise

so you take a brain desperate for the different
bored blind and bullshit bound and
give it an autumn sunset over central illinois
pink clouds shot through with strokes of blue and purple and

as the sun swallows the horizon
the fire dwindles
into a dark so thick
you can chew

it's easy to convince yourself
only god could paint like that
then after offering us something so beautiful
snuff it out like it was nothing

dead man

dead man walking from bed to bath, unaware he's awake until the water hits his knees, no need for light, no need for reflection, yesterday's clothes work just as well today

dead man flocking with the rest of the procession, twelve miles, two hours, radio on repeat, the lost thoughts of a thousand numb commuters hover low over an ancient highway

dead man knocking on doors that dangle like babies' teeth in the mouths of abandoned houses, hoping that the rats will answer able to provide a forwarding address for the ghosts who might have lived there

dead man rocking his little dead son, unable to make the kid stop crying, offering everything, anything at all, all authority over the dark dead house and its many splendors because it was given to me and i can give it to whomever i choose

dead man walking through his father's rotted cornfield, the leaves still whispering, the smell of semen still on the stalks

dream: strange, recurring

i am standing at the top of the stairs...i am standing at the bottom of the stairs

i am standing at the top of the stairs shouting down towards the bottom

i am standing at the bottom of the stairs signalling towards the top

this is not my house, these are not my stairs
something bad is in the basement and someone's coming up the lane

at the top of the stairs i am screaming in a language i've never heard
the words are nearly too heavy for my tongue to lift
they fall like hammers and anvils and burst like pianos on the basement floor

at the bottom of the stairs i am trying to make sense of jagged syllables
as they hurtle towards me exploding at my feet

there are headlights through the window

at the top of the stairs i am framed in fire

at the bottom of the stairs i am covered by my shadow

something bad is in the basement with me and i am signalling towards the top for help
i can't see my own hands waving in front of my face

at the top of the stairs i am shouting down in a language i can't understand: i can't understand
i am trying to shout somebody's coming

i want to run down into the basement to hide from who's coming
who's torn the crooked screen door open, whose key is in the deadbolt
whose house i shouldn't be in

at the bottom of the stairs i am thrashing my arms through the dark
like a swimmer drowning in oil

something bad is in the basement, i hear it behind me writhing in its sleep
dreaming of little boys too afraid to turn around while the scent of sweat gently tickles its nose

at the top of the stairs i am holding my breath
my breath is a ball lodged in the pit of my stomach, it refuses to stop bouncing
there are feet behind me trying to creep, each soft step sends tiny vibrations across the floor
and travelling up my legs

at the bottom of the stairs i wince at the sound of nails pulled out of wood
a rusty hinge shrieks, a chain rattles

at the top of the stairs static lifts the hair round my cowlick towards the hand hovering behind
me

at the bottom of the stairs rancid breath passes through rotted teeth down the back of my shirt

i am hurling myself from the top of the stairs falling towards the bottom but never landing
brushing past a body halfway down

i am tearing at the bottom of the stairs like an animal
each step i gain towards the top sends the top farther from me
i am climbing towards a body falling towards me