

## Ruby Ann's Summer

It's been hot as a devil's tooth since the drought.  
I can't even put my cigarettes out the window  
of my car, for fear of fire, but the truth is,  
the sun's been beatin' on me to quit anyhow.

My wooden porch crucifies my feet.  
It's probably conviction splinterin'  
my steps, 'cause I don't believe in  
God no more.

Jesse Ray's truck bed's been burnin' my thighs  
since I been brave enough to let it.  
There ain't nothin' romantic bout it though,  
don't need to be when your bones is rhythm-n-blues.

I been howlin' at moonshine most nights,  
drinkin' in the summer like it's all I'll ever have.  
If I'm lucky it will be.  
But luck ain't never shown me no kindness.

When night falls and it's just me and the stars,  
I sometimes pretend I believe in God again,  
pray to the son that gave me the sin,  
prey to the sin that gave me the son.

But I ain't worried none.  
Summer heat's always been said to make you mad.  
And I've done seen too much humidity to tire  
of the way this moisture pours into my skin.

## Ruby Ann Weathers the Storm

They tell me, "Weather the storm,"  
but my hands been twitchin' since daddy left,  
and my fingers extract lightnin' from his suitcase, where that  
sleeve of his white button-up was hangin' out the zipper,  
reachin' for me as he walked out the door.

And they tell me, "Don't bite off more than you can chew,"  
but I've been bitin' since the food came scarce and  
momma could only serve those beans she'd stripped clean of strings.  
Canned in the basement where daddy's tools been hankerin' for use--  
far away from momma's carpentry.

And they got the nerve to tell me, "To everythin' there's a season,"  
but my breath is southern sweat and my hair's been rainin' since  
that storm they told me to weather, and my eyes,  
they harvest this raw earth I been dealt.

So when they water down my life with clichés,  
I let my red hair fall and tell them:  
Weather this storm.

## Ruby Ann Comes to Terms

I ain't seen the truth in God since Sunday School.  
All them church ladies fattenin you up for the glory day,  
when gluttony is prized, but whiskey ain't.  
They'll sharpen their teeth on your eyes if you let em.

Sometimes I look for God in the sky,  
'cause he sure ain't in the church.  
Been searchin' the sun too long to see.  
They call him the light, but he's never lit my darkness

I done been through enough in this life to know it ain't real  
Keep tryin to do it right, but all it leads me to is wrong.  
Not quite sure if right and wrong exist really.  
Just a bunch of feelin's 'sociated with levels of guilt and pride.

All of it's sin. Don't nobody know it though.  
Or they ignore it.  
Pullin' for beliefs like they're stuck in the attic  
behind those rock records said to be satanic.

I come to terms long time ago that life is just something you get through.  
And the heart can't solve the poor man's grief  
Cause love is free, but livin' ain't.  
Which is probably why these women seek their God in the sun.

## Sometimes the Sidewalks

Sometimes the sidewalks  
taste ashes from cigarettes  
that fall from the lips of girls  
praying for lung cancer  
because they don't fear death,

and there's never enough  
smoke to blow  
out of the windows of cars  
with older men  
who remind them of their  
daddies.

The same girls who  
butcher their faces with  
eyeliner and lipsmack  
so that they can feel  
the eyes of strangers  
melt off their makeup  
from across the room.

Yes, sometimes the sidewalks  
tear a young girl up  
in it's hunger for servitude.

## On Bended Tree

After the hurricane,  
when the rain has softened the ground  
and the wind has dismantled street signs--  
when the gulls are left in bleeding cries,  
We go to that curve in the wood,  
perfect as a fresh stain.  
The bent tree on the left,  
a broken statue of our harlot bones,  
gazes upon us as if it can see discolored skin.  
We sit upon its mangled torso.  
Weave our feet through tangled limbs,  
and hope it can see past  
the etching of our hands.