

**Odysseus/Calypso**

I.

My hands touch tender as a gravestone –

I am encountering myself – she who loved you  
she has been here all along, she will be  
steely twangs and ocean waves and  
Atlantic City circa August summer,  
she is February, a pine smell in snow,  
she is you, the only part of you left to me –

She is real.

You are real.

I do not know what I miss about you

I cannot remember you without her

She waited for you –

You were on your way – Odysseus

I was on my way home.

II.

Are you the crumbled tower or

the bomb exploded

the still shaking bones

my medal of honor hung limp

against hollowed out chest

I did not die

Not physically – gods are unkind in this way

Still I do not care that you were worthless, ephemeral

That you could not love me

That you ran from me – you were brave

once

what would you say now?

III.

This is what I ran from – the sound, the hum

across bow strings, call of home

deep south beckoning

old reckoning-loving blood, my ancestors

spun in their graves, dynamos of the inferno

my magnetism repelled their every contingency –

the very idea of retreat! The very idea!

IV.

I re-traced edges within craters – fingerprints

mine or yours

we were men in the moon, fractured

faces, I am cracked and drifting

back down

I have fallen

into sweet nitrogen soil smelling of decay

## The Business End of a Nail Gun

I am filled with a silent hate marched  
ragged through too many doorways  
with only one skin, one eye

Sing, it commands

My mouth opens and only salt  
preservation for raw meat,  
even howls have ceased noisy  
tearing of stringy hearts beneath cedars

A wolf lives in a wood with my hate  
lying quiet as an ottoman, leather  
boots propped on spines,  
reminders built into furniture,  
the business end of a nail gun

A house can feel like gray soot and mean  
wishes directed at people who loved me  
once  
never as many times as I needed

The opposite of freedom once sat  
across a table eating eggs  
talking about his day job

**Hanged Man**

You came wading across the water

I thought

I saw

A ghost drowned upside down

hanged man dangling on the shimmering surface

fortune teller's symbol

shifting perspective

In my fear I tried to remember gunning you down

last time in Reno, after complimenting your mother's red beans and rice

it being too hot, cooked too long – I lied

fingering the gun on my hip

tipping point

You fell backward into the river

cigarette falling from your mother's lip

as her hand, fingers stretched

unable to close the new gap between

My laughter echoed all the way into the half-filled

crockpot, and yet

here you are

After me all the time

trying to feed me from

salty pockets filled with mold and algae  
old promises, broken

*But*

I cry, my mouth filled with lake

*I'll just keep killing you right back again*

**(Guilt)**

Do you understand that I cannot  
live with what I have done  
With what transgressions, flayed sacred  
How could I, How could I have known  
The rite, the right ritual  
botched, blotted line and clotting wound  
What sacrifice is needed –  
a fleshy one, a timely one, a loved one?

What must I give you whoever you are –  
tell me your name, shadow self, shadow-eye  
glaring in a dark corner

What would you have me do –  
what symbol will you ingest?

What do you seek in this garden?  
*I have eaten my fill*, comes a snarl

What do you require, beastly me  
What would you have me do to ease –  
fragile, wild mind

What have you done, what have you let me do?

Mirrored teeth in your head tearing  
reflections, our image

Do you not think it is time to stop bleeding –

black blood and bile

Are you not wounded and exhausted?

You must, biding and bludgeoned beastly me

You must not consume –

You must not succumb.

## Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

The roof of the capitol was green  
copper covered with gaudy terracotta stacked tall and cylindrical  
over the Berlin-esque granite Teddy Roosevelt once admired  
enough to call it the most handsome building  
he'd ever seen  
It was a palace of pipe dreams glimmering  
gloom and doom  
over the winding Susquehanna, only the water named for natives now  
Manhiem and Lancaster and Ephrata washed white  
what darker ancestors might have baptized as sacred

The trains ran through it and begrudged the stop on their way  
to more important places like Baltimore, New York  
Philadelphia  
where the same hard architecture crowded colonial grave markers  
littered with coins for good luck, ours included  
I couldn't say whether they were places I'd have rather been  
because I was so far away from anywhere  
I would have gone anywhere to be  
closer to you

We were only ever the length of the river apart  
down the name of a street I can't recall  
the sides of rising row houses  
or industrial skeletons of boom town travesty



And you were situated between the river and the interior  
nestled on the hill overlooking  
the green roof of the capitol  
where I stood once in my love glory assured  
of my victory  
amid ruins and defeated young men you called friends

Harrisburg has no catchphrase, no brotherly love  
to bind with quotations or notoriety  
nor does it have elemental qualities of earthy  
steel brilliance like Pittsburgh to the west, the only city of its kind  
you once told me  
due to the fact that it still bears the "h" when other burgs shunned  
their silent German roots  
as you might have done  
when you contemplated changing your surname  
from one denoting the guilt of your father  
to one lending you the feeble strength of your mother

But you did not change your name

And mine could never match it  
even at the height of my hopes on top of the capitol roof  
I still stood stark and sour against  
the golden Commonwealth, all gilded beauty

Years ago when I showed up

on the western shore of the Susquehanna, unknowing  
a death awaited me across the river,  
a baptism performed only with a handful of dusty fear  
thumb to forehead after the fire  
spreading a paper thin promise across the brow