Act I – Merlot

—Prettier this way, the napkin read. Danny laughed. 
“A glass of Merlot,” Danny laughed.
He put the napkin aside with the others. They sat scribbled in a wet ring of brandy left on the bar. Danny twirled the pen between his fingers, clicking it against his rings. The bartender motioned for it; Danny motioned back,
—No.
“He’s got to sign for it,” the bartender said.
“Put it on my tab. I’m not done.”
Danny traced over the letters,
—Prettier this way.
Prettier: more romantic, more surreal.
Danny imagined himself fleeing from and within white hallways down his mind.
—It’s not like anybody’s home.
Danny laughed.
The napkin said everything he would have said.
—To whom?
—God knows.
—God will read it, stapled to my bones.
He traced over the letters once more, and put the napkin in his chest pocket.
—For later.
Fumbling in the same pocket, he pulled out a cigarette, and grabbed his glass.
—Little eulogies. I write them in my head. I write them all the Time.
—I swim in goodbyes.

Memory blazed a trail to Jack’s first drink.
“Some scotch,” he said, offering his card.
The bartender filled him a glass and a Bordeaux Glass for his neighbor. His neighbor twirled a pen between his fingers, clicking it against his rings, tracing letters on a napkin. The bartender motioned for the pen.
“He’s got to sign for it,” he said to the neighbor.
“Put it on my tab. I’m not done,” the neighbor said back.
Jack assessed his neighbor’s body. Handsome and young, his blue eyes spidered around the countertop of the bar, phasing in and out of focus, scrambling for a focal stain or grained wood pattern to lock his gaze. He wore many layers, all brown and black, a black scarf, driving gloves cut off at the fingers, an old cap over his dusty crop, and old and fraying boots, frays on his cuffs and old tears and marks and stains across his chest and sleeves. Deliberately he sipped his wine; he drank with distraction. Still he traced over the letters written on his napkin.
“Thanks,” Jack said to his neighbor, but he had already risen from the barstool and began towards the door. He walked with a drunk gait, and his left boot dragged untied under his heel. Jack watched each step carry his neighbor toward and out the door, pulling a lighter up to the point of his cigarette even before he was outside. The bartender made a motion towards his neighbor’s pile of napkins. Jack motioned back,
—No.
He pulled the napkins across the countertop to rest beside his glass. He sipped it and looked down at the pile of letters.
—Little shreds of poetry.
—Forgive me, read the napkin at the top of the pile. Jack grabbed it, and after drying the bottom of his glass with his shirt he placed his scotch directly on top of his neighbor’s scrawled parable.
—Forgive yourself, read the napkin beneath it.
—Penmanship of a kid who was never made to trace cursive in school.
—Hands unstruck by wooden rulers, letters:
     —slanted and tall, dreaming in cursive. Only dreaming.
“Do you know him?” Jack asked the bartender.
“Not well,” the bartender said. “I’ve seen him, sure.”
Jack unbuttoned his coat and draped it over his stool. He fixed his eyes on the coatrack by the door. Two hung on the hooks, like signs signifying cold. Inside the bar, the heat of a few quiet bodies kept him comfortable.
The bartender poured Jack another drink.

Danny blinked once at the light.
Outside, the light was muted. One old light shrouded in mothdust bled out into the night like a candle.
—Candlelight reveals nothing but the breadth of darkness.
—I read this, somewhere.

The breadth of tonight’s darkness was great.
Down the steps to the bar, the streetlights whispered life into the cracked sidewalk and its patron weeds, breeding out of the earth, slipping into hibernation, eyes like owls’ in the evening Time of October. Streets twisted along the memory of cow trails from Times long passed, echoing the chaos of the cows’ instincts, the

—Pat pat
of their hooves echoing through Time, through the vast windings of the past, beating a silent rhythm through its flux into the present, like a softly spoken poem:
—Pat pat pat
—This is the quickest way to the water, the cows agreed.

In his mind, Danny saw three cows grazing the reeds on a beach, galloping up to the tiny waves to have their hooves tickled by the cold surf.
—Malbec, Noir, and Rosé, he named them.
He watched them age through a passing moment by the reeds, moonlight reflecting against the wet sand.

Danny some Times felt the ocean might, by some arbitrary conviction, swallow all the sky’s moonlight into its mercury surf. He thought, at least, this is what he would do, were he the sea: to swallow light, to slow it down, recode the clock

Danny longed to be the sea.
He longed to undulate against passing vignettes of human Time, painting crests along the shore wreathed in dawn light, coy as the sea tends to be: luring the swimless into its web and watching, not with eyes but with a perceptive touch, as they drown beneath its surface.
—And swimless light, too.
The light above the door went out, and Danny flicked away his cigarette, half finished, its arc and descent to the ground trailed by an unwinding spool of light, impossible to rewind. Even after it landed, the small light endured forward through Time, if still in space.
Nothing showed itself now but grey—an intrinsic grey, the palette of a somber cityscape, cocktail hour, and out the window, towers, steel antennae, steel steeles cut their shapes into an impregnably starless firmament.

Blinded in the darkness, Danny went back inside.

An old man before an empty glass was picking through his napkin ruminations, spreading them across the bar.
—Old snoop.
Danny felt insecure, but quickly forgot.
—At least it’s pretty, he thought, looking over the old man’s shoulder at his lettering.
—Tall and slanted, written in sleep,
—sleepwritten.

“I’m a poet,” Danny laughed, at himself.
“Sorry,” said the old man.

Danny grabbed the napkins and tossed them over the bar into the trash.
—Hesitation marks.
—Prettier this way, he reminded himself.
The old man’s glass stood on Danny’s penultimate draft.
—Forgive me, read the bottom of his empty cup, sleepwritten letters warped through the frame of glass.

—The empty glass recites foreign thoughts.
—It reads bed Time stories,
—half dreamt lullabies, carried through a wind from the dead mouth of their author, dreamwritten, as though by a character in a book, ergo,
—by the author himself, a perseverated self-projection.
—All the world’s
—afraid.

“Keep it,” Danny said when Jack made to dispose of the napkin. Condensation from the glass slid down to form a spreading ring of wet that groped for the corners of his letters, absorbing and blotting their ink into blotted nameless symbols, illegible, tangential.

“Thanks,” said the old man, sounding uncomfortable. “I’m Jack,” he said.
—Old Man Jack.

“Danny,” Danny said. He motioned to the bartender, who stood at the far end of the counter. “I’ll have whatever Jack’s having,” he said. Freed of agency.
The bartender strolled from the far end of the bar and laid out a glass on a fresh napkin. Danny took a sip, and coughed.
—Old Man Jack and his Old Man Scotch. Here

—Makes everything else taste a little less sour.
—The empty glass sings in birdsong, to wake from a nightmare
—which came from up
—Here
—Lies Old Man Jack.

Danny reached into his chest pocket and withdrew the crumpled napkin. He read its letters over again. It said everything he would have said.

He resumed tracing the letters, sleepwritten, dreaming in cursive.
— I want my letters dark as coffee stains.
— Prettier that way.
— And maybe another Merlot.

Danny watched streaks of wine stream down the inside of his Bordeaux Glass. At the bottom, converged, the wine looked black. In its minute puddle a light hanging over the bar reflected a beautiful purple into the glass like a bubble. The static light danced in the bar’s vibrations. Danny felt each step of every patron, the repeating
— Pat pat pat
of their movements, miniature quakes shaking the wood floor, causing imperceptible tremors to spider up the bar, throb and quiver within a single drop of Merlot, dancing in its own whirlpool. Ripples indistinctly small inflated out from the wine’s center, glazed against the inside of the glass.
— Maybe not.
— The pill,
— the whole glass turns black, just like wine, dancing in a cup.
He emptied the wine into his throat and chased it down with
— Old Man Jack’s Old Man Scotch
and coughed. Both empty glasses stood before him, and he imagined they were spools, joint by a thread.

He traced his letters again. He curved the pen down the slope of each symbol, spiraled the dots over each i, painting galaxies. He named the first one the Lilac Galaxy, and felt suddenly drawn to it.

In it, he painted a Dandelion Solar System.

Danny painted in his mind a dancing center, two singularities in tango, one greater, absorbing its companion into its impossible weight, incorporating its impossible soul.
— The whole bottle.

He recalled a conversation:

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“No, not even toothpaste bottles. The edges are too sharp. These girls will do anything for interruption.
They put timers on all the showers. These girls would try anything.
Mostly it’s just the white walls, the bars on all the windows.
They put baby bumpers on every corner, like they’re our babysitters. It’s like we’re playing House.
It’s like being an actor on a stage.
They wear white gowns like wedding dresses, and one with a clipboard asking for Merlot,
little echoing sound signifiers like pieces of rice in a kid’s maraca: a picnic of selves.”

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1 Hupokrisis;
The whole building’s one big Bordeaux Glass.
— There is Merlot, at its center, dancing.
— And surrounding her, several nurses, waiting.
Danny considered the vertex of exhaustion that seemed to him indistinguishable from hallucination.
He saw reactions unfolding all around him.
He was a painter, inside his mind, painting dreams in free association:
a bluing reagent on a glass coffee table,
a mother’s ghost, whose barely shy opacity wavers against the wind,
her ghostly bulk spilling out of its borders,
her ghostly tears falling in rhythm to the beat of
the conductor’s eulogy,
splashing on the grass like bluing eyedrops, devoured by the materializing rain.
He painted a drop of ink that fell into water:
one little drop, and the whole glass turned black.
— You wonder about the hospitals on the Garonne River.
— You wonder about Kettering in-patient.

Jack watched as Danny’s eyes tunneled in and out of focus. He would begin to trace the letters, quickly and with a strong hand, but then his eyes would drift, and his wrist would slacken, and he’d seem to forget entirely what he had been doing. Then he’d blink, and return to the napkin.
He traced one last Time over the parable, and the pen ripped through the paper cloth.

— Shit.

Jack struggled to decipher Danny’s appearance.
At once, he looked bundled and plump, wrapped and swaddled in his layers, and yet skeletally thin, the pointed joints of bones peaking out of his darker skin. An unmanicured pasture emerged from his jaw, dark but not black, a hint of red suggested by the glow of the bar’s light, a mere shade darker than the umber locks by his ears, tickling his head, his skin so young. Several rings wrapped his fingers, which shook, loose, unnoticed by their bearer. His hands looked older than all the rest of him, but not like a woodworker’s or a shipman’s—more emaciated, Jack thought, like needled fingers, needles that pricked the skin of a friend’s held hand, and withdrew, ashamed, stricken with agency.

— What wicked instruments, these hands!
— Might as well be burning books.

And his eyes, too bright to match his midtoned skin, crystal blue like a fjord under a bright August sun, iced and numbed, sharply frozen into their bleached irises, a light blue sky made intricate by imperceptibly lighter clouds, passing by, frozen.
One of his teeth was golden.
— Everything will settle, Jack recalled.

Danny seemed unable to sit still. He shifted in his stool, pulling out and counting his cigarettes, returning them to his pocket—clicking open and unclicking the pen on the bar, scratching his
—Filthy!
fingernails along and against the grain of the wood, and every few moments, fixing his gaze
directly away from Jack, towards the clock.

—Three hands point all the way to the ends of space.

Jack counted six rings: two on his left hand, both silver, simple bands, and four on his
right, sculpted of cheaper metals. No carvings, no designs.
Earrings hung lopsided down his face, two small hoops, shining in the bar's light.
Tattoos spidered up from the fingers of his left hand to his wrist and under his sleeve,
tucked away,

—For later.

And his skin, so pale, and yet suggesting of another darkness, a nebulous ethnicity,
diluted and mostly silent. No cold flush colored his face—it seemed carved of a bland
wood, his ears offering a single shade of color in his otherwise greyscale portrait.
He clenched his fists, gently, and rubbed his knuckles against the bar.
Jack was glad that he sat a couple stools away.
Every few moments, Danny would freeze completely, his shaking body becoming utterly
still, statuesque, as if he held his breath—and
kept
  it
in
far
too
long:
—Still
  frozen:
until at last he emptied his lungs, audibly, his body resuming its slouched posture, his elbows
striking the counter of the bar and leaning there, his hands occasionally offering shelter to
his uncomfortable face, or reaching for a violent scratch on his arm, or otherwise, gestures
of nothing: of distraction.
Jack wondered if he could see him staring.

—How surreal are the landscapes painted by these wood grains.
—How beautiful this surrealist wood!
—“Danny laughed,” I laugh, inside my mind.

Jack turned away, returning to his drink, unable to keep Danny out of his peripheral
vision, whether he’d have liked to or not.
He recalculated his route.
—Wheels down at noon.
—Best take route one.
—What must Boston look like from the sky?
—What a thing, to see a city from above.
How long Danny had been drinking seemed to stretch further back—into last week—than his troubled sobriety could recall.
—Just last week, he recalled.
The beauty of the poison was that it hid the passage of Mundane Time, the kind that echoes plainly between the walls of a grandmother’s hallway (slapped against the floral wallpaper) at two fifteen in the afternoon,—or eleven forty five in the morning, those dreary Times of day, the sorts of daily moments, like tedious rituals, fragments of a fragmented ennui, that ever tend to haunt the vacancies of life.

Danny could discern a memory evoked by any succession of numbers on a clock:

at six twenty six in the evening he looked from the sink full of dishes to the digital clock above the stove;
at four nineteen in the afternoon he closed a window, an analog materializing in its reflection;
at nine fifty nine in the northeast night he noticed an episode of television cut off one minute too early;
at three forty in the morning he tossed over in his bed, got up to pee, poured himself a shallow glass of wine, brushed his teeth, and returned to sleep.
—I am the master of Mundane Time:
—I collect
—I hoard
—its foliage,
its sheddings.
The beauty of the poison blurred his countless motley maps of countless motley moments, arbitrary strings of blotted nameless symbols, illegible, tangential:
—Silent Time, passing silently: unnoticed.

When Danny was ten years old—
—No, no,
—When I was fifteen years old, my mother taught me how to drive.
She brought him to the empty parking lot of the nearby pharmacy because it was closed on Sundays and notably free of curbs, medians, traffic, especially so late at night, around eight twenty one pm according to the car clock, after the sun had set but still before the death of twilight that precedes that true night-dark.
The pharmacy was attached to the favorite local grocery store of Patusan, first left off Old Town Road, owned by an eagle of a woman who was also the mother of one of Danny’s high school peers, Emily, her last name indistinct against Time, the same girl with whom he had once sustained a brief but evocative conversation about asceticism, the same class in which he’d once discovered—and subsequently forgot
the nature of his relationship with his Self.
—The pneuma, Me, is fuelled by its qualia, my body its diminutive vessel, which if set free of
—sex, sugar; sex;
—inhabits a smaller space, wrought from its Text into a gloss, glossated by my pneuma into a tool, rather than a synergetic whole: my body like a vase, or rather, like an urn.
—Within the talisman, the Text, the body, this coalescence of flesh, tissue, bone—biological reactions power the matrix of thought, which is less intrinsically tied to an external reality than the demands of the body.
—A harmonic equilibrium of the carnal Text, stripped wholly of its desires, sex, sugar; sugar;
—frees the pneuma from the physical limitations of its codependent container.
—And in relinquishing the terrain of the Text, the body, we become free to explore the terrain of the mind, the Gloss: a surrealist terrain, vastly more emotive than the prosaic landscapes of Patusan:
—whether its purple asphalt or whether its Presbyterian church, its steeples painted against the pastel sky like tears in canvas;
—or the Mundane walks there, or the Mundane walks home; trite trees trite bushes trite weeds trite marsh trite light: platitudeous street signs: Tired Blueberry Lane, Tired Rowley Ave, Tired Old Town Road: Mundane Space Place.

She gave Danny the driver’s seat and walked him through the steps:
1. Close the door; this is fundamentally important to your safety. You must vacuum seal your reference frame.
2. Twist the key in the ignition until you hear it, feel it, you will feel the ignition of life in its combustion; it will make itself known to you.
3. Sit back and relax; this is fundamentally important to your joy.
—Harder than I’d thought, driving.
4. Check your mirrors, always check your mirrors. There are three. The left shows you your adjacent roadcompanions, so you can avoid collision. The other, right here, does the same, but with less precision. This mirror is illusive: it will stretch space and confound you, because we know, because it has been made known to us, that the left2 is more immediate than the right, more vital, more fundamental to your awareness. The final mirror is an anomaly: at once it shows you the past through passed things, a bridge, a curve in the road, an excerpt of air—and yet it also shows you the future, objects propelling towards you, chasing your tail, foreshadowing moments bound by their precursive factors to transpire in Time and space. This is the rearview mirror; it is fundamentally important to your locative and temporal footing behind the wheel3.
5. The left pedal by your foot is the brake: press and hold it. This will prevent the car from bringing you anywhere you do not wish to go.
6. Embrace the shifter in your grasp: this is your scepter of mobility.
7. Instruct it to your preference: it can pause your flux through space in its first setting. The second setting will allow you to undo a previous action. The third setting is vague and you will not find it necessary, at least not yet; but when you do, it will submit your vehicle to the fundamental forces of the universe, liberated from your deliberation. The fourth setting is the primary counterpart of the first: it bestows a

2 Sinistra, obviously;
3 Rota Fortunae; horologium; amphora;
profound faculty of movement, and under your command it will carry you to the furthest reaches of space. The remaining three settings are parallel: they deposit you into microcosmic sovereignties, constraining your deliberation for more specific purposes. You will only find these settings useful in the face of precarious conditions, like:

—Frozen water, in all its forms.

8. Keeping your foot steady on the brake, once you’ve pulled the shifter into Drive, take a moment to feel the hum of your vehicle. Just as a knight must steel himself for a taxing journey, you must devour one full breath of air and release it into the vehicle’s steady murmur. Understand the power of your deliberation: understand the potential for destruction at your fingertips. Submit momentarily to the fear, and swallow it.

9. Slowly, never slowly enough, release your foot from the brake. A sensation of boundless freedom will envelop you. There may be a chill, there may not. A dizzying feeling is common: you are now occupying a Second Body, more mechanical and exponentially more deadly than your First. Become intimate with it; be conscious of its parts: the engine’s purr, the resistance of the rota, the urgency of the brakes, the power of the gas.

10. Slowly, never slowly enough—


10. (continued) —shift your foot from the brake to the gas. Slowly, slowly;

11. Proceed.


14.

15. Escape.

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Danny assumed the posture of a car passenger, uncomfortably still outside the manger of inertia, transfixed in stillness, statuesque.

Jack watched his breathing, slow, slowly; his skin unwashed, breathing, rising, falling, breathing in and breathing out and having been breathed out.

—Who must his mother have been.

—Mr. Silver’s Old Man Scotch.

Danny was visible through his unnoticed gestures, the little things, the rhythm of his tapping fingers, the spasmodic paroxysm of his eyes, the irregularity of his respiration, all accumulated as an indistinct energy, exuded not from his body, but from Him: a deeply permeating inability to sustain focus, as a blind mouse dropped into a terrarium, unaware of the host it has just become patron to, unwittingly awaiting its own consumption, but also strangely different now, its pneuma residing Elsewhere, surely perceptive of the unsettling
relocation, the timbre of the terrarium, the transcendental presence of the Snake, compelling the creature to wander less freely, less boldly, relegated to its neat corner and haven, its thirst for life substituted unwittingly with a futile vigilance.

—sugar; sugar;

Danny fingered a splinter on the counter, protruding in the space between him and Jack. —Thorough analysis of anything can reveal its interior universes, visible

—Deixic sliver!

—to Danny; I see only a wood fiber. Jack set his gaze down. Danny looked at the ceiling.

—Summer!
—suspending God’s weight against gravity;  
—like a false vacuum.
—Deixic Space!
Danny stood up to smoke, accidentally catching Jack’s gaze mid-departure.

“Sure.”

—Deixic Mundane Time—  
—its foliage! its sheddings!
—growing, shedding between us.

“It’s cold,” Danny suggested. Jack took his coat off his barstool and occupied it.

—This is the quickest way to the parking lot, the cows agreed. They left the bar’s warmth to where one flickering light strobed the asphalt. Danny lit a cigarette and blew his first drag directly at the stroboscopic bulb, briefly submerging their deixic moment into a dream, just awoken.

The Octobered grass growing between cracks defied illumination, shadowed a dance upon the purple asphalt, a convulsing tango of shadowy filaments, swaddled in wind —and light. Showing me the ground. Showing me root clusters between asphalt cracks, growing out of caught dirt like dead parents, soil like their dead parents, soil like a Text called “Was,” existing boundlessly, devouring the future through its mouth, the Now, reclaiming its children, decomposing them into caught dirt, into “Was,” fertilizing the next generation—right here, this Octobered grass.

Jack lit a cigarette.

Danny’s bundled self seemed to dance in the darkness, the texture of his disposition surfing the night’s wake, his eyes like blue moons, like blue fluorescing puddles in their cavities.

A dark husky scrambled up to them in the darkness, pushing its snout at their thighs and under their hands, asking for love. Its owner walked alone, just beyond the light’s reach, slow and solemn, watching the dog’s movement, awaiting the vertex of a moment to call the distracted creature back to his side, reunited, to endeavor once again into the night.

—Have my bread, little pup, my meat.
—I've only known you for just a little while.
—Little pup!
—I love you till the fissures find me
—all washed up.

—Identical eyes.
The light flickered violently and went out, devoured by shadows.
“It’s dark,” Danny said.
“Must be a new moon,” Jack said.
“There’s a parade in the morning,” Danny said. “The Boy scout Parade. They’ll march right through here.”
“You’re from around here, then?” Jack asked.
—Yes, Here, living and breathing Here, Unheimlich Mass, Merlot’s Mclean’s, her very mausoleum. Yes, I live here. Yes, this is home.
—Yes, yes,
“Yes,” Danny said. “I’ve been here all my life.”
—Like in that old movie, how does it go,
—If you stay in one place long enough, your luck will know where to find you.
—I heard this, somewhere.
—Lost Luck, exploring beneath the trees, wandering the world,
stopping at a pharmacy to ask for directions, feeling antisocial and buying a map,
“That’ll be six dollars and ten cents,” said the cashier,
“For a map?” said Luck,
Luck getting into his old car and driving away, down Tired Fortuna St
and into a maze, a yellow light at every juncture, around every corner,
on and on and on till the center, where I am sleeping.
—Lost Luck like a husky puppy sniffing for hickory ham, pawing up to you, stomach grumbling, eyes wide like full moons like
—its face when you hide the hickory ham behind your back.
“Where did the hickory ham go?” says the Pup.
“I don’t know, Pup, where did it go?” you say, and you put the ham into your mouth, while the Pup just watches, wondering,
—What cruelty hath upon my heart been delivered;
—O, why I!

“Do you like it?” Jack asked.
“Living in Patusan? Not really.”
Silence interrupted.
—Such a town, though: its people, its streets, its sense of home. Small enough to be comfortable, small enough to know its kind, to meet storeowners and hear their stories, to raise kids and send them through its schooling, to engage with its community, to support its local economy and construct that haven of familiarity, the sort that perseveres longer than you ever could: a transgenerational oasis, a vacuum-sealed reference frame.
—Remote enough that you’ll never catch sight of that door’s opening, the door that carries you through to another place, a larger place, with a soil of history, a web of
knowledge, a revelation of global communion, the boundless destinations and interminable experiences satiating your thirst fractionally slower than they dehydrate you, so once you go through you’ll never come back, but you’ll always wish you’d never come Here in the first place.

—The isolation, then, the bound space, seems so navigable from Here, from within it. The privilege to exist inside a box and remain wholly unaware of its place inside a warehouse of a thousand other boxes, infinite townships from hundreds of countries with each their own root nexus of experience, each their own lives and narratives, loves lost, friends found, connections made—

—With each their own heartbreaks, their own tragedies, their own deaths, friends distanced, parents aged, dogs dead, trees withered, Pharmacy Parking Lots infested with stalky weeds and Mundane footsteps always treading their blank pages, saying “Hello!” to the pretty girl walking through the Pharmacy Parking Lot, suspended under frozen clouds, her dark curly hair, white skin, white satin gloves all the way up her arm, all the way over her shoulders, subducting into the interior cavern of her body, sewn beneath her collarbone, a white satin carpet rolled out to the shore of a Merlot lake, casting the reflection of her colossal vertebrae, wreathed in flesh and woven through winetasting veins like winding roads like Tired Old Town Road, stretching in tangles towards a Brobdingnagian heart, beating its quaking pulse into the lake, dancing in its own whirlpool, distorting the image of her spine into that of a charmed snake, dancing with its foe, reaching from for the base of her neck, Below that algorithm of filaments —fusing— a doomed mind to its — m — u — s — r — k — e — e — x — l — e — t — o — n —

her contours dreaming in cursive, like the promise of Finally At Last, and After So Long, to arrive! within love,

Quoth she, black jeans, black shirt, black eyes, black lips, like a hero Here, a prelapsarian Eve, un-yet-tempted.
Oh

“I’ve been here a little too long,” Danny said. “I used to like it. But all my friends have gone. And now it just feels like the past.”

“Why haven’t you left?” said Jack.
—Un-yet-bloomed.

“I don’t know. You know how it goes.”
—Mundane Time, Time’s quickest pace.

Old Man Jack murmured something and looked away. Danny finished his cigarette and immediately wanted another, but Jack had almost finished his. He watched the old man, profoundly old, seasoned with pepper in his hair, illuminated lightly by the collection of distant streetlamps, coughing on his last pull, his furrowed forehead host to a labyrinth of wrinkles, frozen like evergreens in winter, his Decembered eyes not blue like ice, like his, but a hueless black, the black of the night once that stroboscopic bulb surrendered At Last.

He was no taller than Danny’s chin. He pushed his lower lip and jawbone outwards, wetted his upper lip, tried to swallow it, sniffed running mucus back up his nose, and refocused his eyes. He stumbled against a rail and stood up straight again.

Something intangible pulled at the kitestring leashed to Danny’s mind, pulling it backwards, pulling it down.
—Would prefer never to grow so old.
—*Horologium* like a right-hand turn, three four five…

*Ding!*

Jack followed Danny back inside. They each ordered another drink, Danny a glass of wine, characteristically;
—Who, so late? esp. when
— in scotch veritas?

But it had quit its sting, spilling down Jack’s throat. An amber fluid, a sepia vignette around Danny’s scrawled
—Gone! Danny’s scrawled

—Hesitation marks
—belong in the trash, anyways.

“Thanks,” he didn’t say.

“Another?” the bartender never said.

Jack fought to remember the parable in the battlefield of his accumulated memories, slipping between bodies, lost in the vapors of passing Time, the scrawled passage, a mirage of daylight beckoning to him, its hopeful glimmer lost in corridors:
—Forgive...
—forgive whom?

*Danny, if you would, and tell him it’s from me*

“What was that you were writing? on the napkins.”

“Oh, just nothing,” Danny said.
—A plea for nothing, he wrote.
   And the rejection letter:
   “Dan Silver,
     We regret to inform you that you have not been accepted into the School
     of Poor Souls on account of several false answers in your application. We hope
     you find what you are looking for Elsewhere.
     Best,
     Old Man Jack”
   handwriting like an old man’s, a madman’s, the sort you find on letters from
   homeless sons of senile parents, probably with brain damage or ptsd or schiz
   ---

   scribbling any of a hundred stories from any of a hundred different voices:
   “When I was sent to prison in Visby,” or,
   “When my wife left me for a Hollywood prettyboy,” or,
   “Three weeks in a white room and no books they said,” etc.
   —Guardian Angel Jack
     —how now.
   —Danny?
     —What did he do.

   “What do you do?” asked Jack.
   “Read, mostly,” Danny said.
   “No, what do you do?”
   —I gather Mundane Time and sell it to my friends.
   “I don’t know. I’m thinking about going to grad school,” Danny said, for the first Time.
   “For what?” Jack asked.
   —They have yet to come up with a word for the study of Time.
     Its measurement, of course—horology, the scholarly study of timekeeping apparati,
     but what about timekept apparati?
   —What do you call an archaeologist who unearths Time capsules only.
     I found the problem!
     You call him an archaeologist.
   —Matter is the only Time capsule.
   —Because what isn’t kept within it.
     Whether to see it as a container. The container.
     Or whether to see it as a hermeneutic,
       wedded to our status as
     Matter, which cannot locate Time
     because Matter only matters to
     tangible perception.
     And Time only to

---

4 We do call it a watch.
those\(^5\) beyond it.
—I can find a word for the study of anything. Because what doesn’t.
  Oenology for example.
  Psychopathology for example.
  Sarcology for
  psychosarcology for example!
  posology, emetology, eschatology,

  *psychopathological chirography for example.*

  Polemology, for example.

“Post-traumatic amnesia,” for example.

—Apostrophic discourse—
  I swim in apostrophic goodbyes.

—But no word for the study of Time.
  How to contain it? that which contains—
    that which has always been, will always be.
    That whose trajectory is universally deixic.
    That whose immaterial existence, too.
  —What else can neither be escaped nor discerned.
  —Which is not Time.
  —Which, indeed, is not Time?
    Duration is my favorite word
    because it means “everything.”

—But no word for Durology.
  Neologism for example.
  —Durology which could be as interdisciplinary as
    Time itself:
    that whose trajectory is
    universally ubiquitous.
    To last the
    study of lasting.
    Which is self-referential too, like
    the oenologist’s Bordeaux Glass.

—You wonder about the
  for the study of its measure; for the study of its passage\(^6\); but what of
  for the study of its ontology?

\(^5\) *The deixic unknown.*

\(^6\) *Durare…*
—Chronontology; for the study of Sequential Time
Perontology; for the study of Passing Time
Temporontology; for the study of Being Finite
Durontology; for the study of Beings Caught Within It.
But what of for the study of It Itself?
Ontological contingency?
For the study of ontological contingency, but
—It exists beyond definition, fractally:
chrono-, pero-, temporo-, durontological contingency;
mnemonic ontological contingency;
homeontological contingency;
universal ontological contingency;

—Memory is different from
Past which is different from
Present which is different from
Now which is different from
Future which is different from
Homeochronology (-temporontology) which is different from
Autochronology (-durontology) which is different from
Cosmochronology (-perontology) which is different from
Time (-ontology).

—One second is about nine billion periods of radiation frequency from caesium atoms resting close to zero degrees Kelvin.
One second is also the second division of the hour into sixty constituents.
Quantitatively precise definition eluded us until 1967 (years passed since three hands pointed all the way to the ends of Space) when it was not discovered, but created.
—Because what has a constant, repeating duration.
On the atomic scale, what has a constant, repeating durology.
Without the second division of the hour how can it be measured?
“The Time between the pendulum’s swing” (cannot account for air resistance, spec. gravity, etc.)
“The orbit of celestial bodies” (subject to variation)
“What keeps everything from happening at the same if all Time is deixic
all Time is relative:
—If an antmile is a humanyard, even Space
   (which is so intricate, so heterogeneous)
is relative;
   and Time
   (which is to that which is so intricate, heterogeneous, a cube to a square)
   for those caught within it (homeodurontological Beings)
is so innavigable!
—I am the master of Danny Time.
—Bartender is master of Bartender Time.
—Like empathy which cannot really be deixic.
   And while Time shares us
   Time cannot be really be shared.

“I don’t know,” said Danny.
—Meridian studies.

“Have you ever made a Time capsule?” Danny asked.
“No,” said Jack.
—Me neither.

Because what isn’t kept within it?

—The whole world is a Time capsule.
   Or is Time its only capsule.
   Does it contain us
   or do we contain it?
—Time is a Space capsule
   Space is a Past capsule
   dirt is a Text called “Was”
   and exists boundlessly.
—Because we know
   in the unraveling of thread it displays its static direction.
   Everybody has their own spool of unpassed Time, spinning out since birth.
Spun out into one long thread. Winding out of its own diminishing radius
   pinched between the thumb & forefinger
   of Time’s trajectory—inescapably ensnared by it—
   escorting us monologically forth, impossible to re-
   wind; impossible to
   stop.
—A long time ago
   the spool’s radius was so great that I couldn’t sit still for a moment.
—Life was bursting with moments.
   No pregnable crack nor crevice unoccupied
   by the sheer density of Time.
   Its liquidlike mass filled every groove and pore.
The moments themselves like coalnuggets, condensed by the ubiquitous
onslaught of duration (the pressure of Time Present
an infinitesimally still moment [the Still]
seeming to contain all Time Passed [dirt
is a Text called…]
within it; proportionally impossible:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Time} (t) &= \infty \\
\text{Future} (f) &= t - \text{Past} (p) \\
p &= t - f; \\
\text{Present} (n) &= (t - f) - p
\end{align*}
\]

so, if

\[
\begin{align*}
f &= \infty - p; p &= \infty - f \\
&\& \& \& \& (\& \text{since} f < \infty; p < \infty)
\end{align*}
\]

then \(f = \infty\)

\[
and p = \infty
\]

therefore, \(p = \frac{\infty}{2}\) and \(f = \frac{\infty}{2}\)

\& \(n = \left(\infty - \left(\frac{\infty}{2}\right)\right) - \left(\frac{\infty}{2}\right)\);

or \(n = (\infty - \infty) - \infty\)

and so \(n = 0\)?

or \(n = \infty\)?

it seems impossible that \(n \neq \frac{1}{\infty}\)

(\(\text{does it feel bigger/smaller to you?}\))

but if \(t - (p + f) = 0\)

the Present does not exist;

and how can we really be sure that

\[
\frac{1}{\infty} \neq 0\?
\]

But of course the Present is \textit{all} that exists.

\[
\text{so } n = \infty?
\]

which would suggest that \(\infty = \frac{1}{\infty}\)

which would be false.

The past and the future do not exist (it either has already, or eventually will), but

without them, what is left?

nothing!

—Perhaps though it is a valueless, singular point;

dividing us into infinite infinitesimal threads

(at which point, Time becomes infinite)

\[
n = \frac{0}{\infty}
\]

which seems to agree.

—But how to account for all of the Past contained within it.
At a non-existent point in Time
how are we capable of summoning vast landscapes of the Past
into our singular minds?
Perhaps $n = \frac{\infty}{0}$
a singular point by which all Time is divided.
Not destroyed. Who knows what happens after $\frac{\infty}{0}$. No, no—
—It must be that—
the Present is the soap film of a bubble floating within Time:
what exists within it is what has Passed;
and what exists beyond it is what has not.
Itself,
no more tangible than an imaginary threshold
which divides one thing into two.
And yet for us to exist within an imaginary threshold—
Perhaps it is not the Past or Future
which are false, but only us—
the Present so infinitesimal to its container that we are occupying what would be
merely a singular point in Space, to us—an invisible thread of Deliberation that runs through the terrain of Time feebly, as the smallest constituent of our own Space
inhabits an infinitesimally small proportion to its whole. And when the Present bubble of Was has stretched to fill all of Time itself, the bubble pops—what is finite dies;
Past, Present, and Future disintegrate
into raw, pure Time; homogenized.

“Probably art,” Danny said.
“What Time is it?” Jack asked.
“I don’t know,” Danny said. “Early.”
“It’s eleven,” said the bartender, hanging Danny’s washed Bordeaux Glass upside down above the bar, catching light as though through a snowglobe, beams refashioned in bulbs, spitting light glitter like painted light all over the walls.
“It’s early somewhere,” Danny said.
—It’s early everywhere.
—Our Time Abode, abiding—
—this Present Nothing, abiding—
—we seem to exist at the summit of Time, but of course
—that which is infinite will always exist
—at the summit of Us.
"When do you close?" Old Man Jack asked the bartender.
"Midnight," said the bartender.
"We've got all day," Danny said.

Danny's head rose and fell in the rhythm of a tide.
Danny's breath was Merlot red.
Danny's talk was tired.

—"One tired tidepool of Merlot, please,"
—"and one glass of Old Man Jack.
"Could I get another drink," Danny said.

Danny's red past cascaded, obscured, into a fresh glass.
—His silver rings obscured through the blackred glass.

—My things obscured through the blackred past.

—Danny like a poet,
—"Sorry," said Jack, grabbing napkins off the bar and piling them onto the
tired tidepool of Merlot, sponging up its red,
—hesitation marks of Time Passed
—Wine like ink like Wine Passed
—like one little drop, and the whole glass turns redblack
—blotted nameless symbols, illegible, tangential,
—wet paper cloth like spilled parables
—which, really, say everything I would have.

"Could I get another drink," Danny said.

Time continued to pass.
"So what's your story?" Jack finally asked.
—Probably art.
"My story?" Danny said.

—All dramatic, Old Man Jack says: "Yes,
Who is Danny?"
—"Yes, who is Danny?" I ask Danny.

Danny is one dash.

—"I know of two," Danny said back to me.
—"Everything you see is Danny number one,
—made up of your five senses.
—Danny number two is away;
—he is made up of everything you cannot see."

"I don't know," Danny said. "I'm sure he's just like you."
“All right,” Jack said.
—“Who is Jack?” I ask Jack.
—“I know of two,” Jack said back.
—“Everything you see is Jack number one,
—and everything you saw was Jack number two.”

“What Time is it?” Danny said.
“I don’t know.”
“It’s quarter past,” the bartender sighed.
Jack looked at the clock, and back at Danny. He imagined a thread tied between them.
“It just keeps on going,” Danny said.
And then Danny was silent, caught in thought.
And then Danny said, “What about you? What’s your story?”
Snide, Old Man Jack said, “I’m sure it’s just like yours.”

“Oh. Well, I’m twenty seven,” Danny said, as if that meant anything. “I grew up here.
I’ve never left the east coast. I don’t know. I’m thinking about grad school. Not really. I’m
thinking about—”
—if moments speak biographies,
—indeed, what am I thinking about?
—or would he rather meet Danny number two, who is perhaps best understood by
—what I am not thinking about.
“I’ve been thinking about moving.”
“Where?”
“Who knows. Maybe California.”
“Don’t you think you’d miss the seasons?” asked Jack.
“I hadn’t really thought about it,” said Danny number two. “But I guess I would.”
“It’s hard to love things that don’t change,” said Old Man Jack, all dramatic.
“It’s hard to love things that do change,” said Danny, all washed up.
“That’s true, too,” said Jack number two.
“What’s easy to love? Dogs. I guess dogs are. They don’t change.”
“Do you have a dog?” asked Jack.
“No,” Danny said. “But I’ve got a cat. He’s called Incitatus.”
—All the cats are Incitatus, lavishly fed gold and they know it.
“I’ve always loved the look of a cat in a window,” Jack said.

—Window Cat Time,
—Time’s slowest pace, even still,
—bordered by the windowsill.

“Do your thoughts ever start to rhyme when you get drunk?” Danny asked.

“I don’t think so,”
—But I don’t know.

“Maybe I should be a poet,” Danny said.
“Do you write poetry?” Jack asked.
“No.”
“It’s never too late while you’re young.”
“I’m drunk.”
Danny finished his wine, gravity in the movement of his eyes, sifting, under a weight, as through the dunes of Time sand, sand like the dead shards of passed mountains, little rocks, little pieces, like rice in a little kid’s maraca.

—A picnic of sandlice.

“Me too,” said Jack, finishing his Old Man Scotch.

“Let’s smoke,” Danny laughed.

Outside, the light was dead. Danny used his lighter to illuminate the steps, reigniting it every step until they reached the bottom of the stoop, where they each lit a cigarette, each leaning on opposite railings, a symmetrical diorama of all that Jack had ever known: feeble light swallowed up by the breadth of dark, vices slipping like smoke, and smoke itself like Decembered Time, embered from matter, falling away into the ever vast spaces of empty places, like empty Space itself—like smoke itself. And there was Danny opposite him, a mirror between them like the threshold that divides one scene into two, each identical and yet polar forces; the yin and yang of just yang.

“You smoke your whole life?” Danny asked.

“Pretty much,” said Jack.

“Lucky you’re still here,” said Danny.

“Pretty much,” said Jack.

“How old are you?” Danny asked.

“Eighty seven,” said Jack.

“Shit,” said Danny. “What have you been doing your whole life?”

“Working,” said Jack. “I work on a farm up by Bangor. Have been for a long Time. Since I was twenty two. Younger than you are. Originally I’m from Norway. That’s where I lived, before I came here. In Narvik. It’s in the North half of the country, on the coast.”

For a minute there was nothing to say, and they finished their cigarettes in silence. They rose from their slouched positions, respectively, and returned inside to their seats at the bar.

“What was Norway like when you left?” Danny asked.

—The Narvik of my youth:

—postlapsarian?

“During the War?” said Jack. “I don’t know. It was desperate.”


—What is a year, anyways?

—What is a year, anyways?

—1940 years after

—three hands pointed all the way to—

“Last call,” the bartender announced.

“We’ll just take the bottle,” Danny said, pouring another glass.

“What was that like?” Danny asked.

“I don’t know,” Jack began. “I left pretty quick.”

“With your family?”

“Not quite. My parents stayed. Maybe they left eventually, but not with me.”

—Probably better off that way.

“A puncture like in tights ruptured, momentarily, through Jack’s world. All of his reality shook, unmoved but teeming against some invisible pressure, which broke through the
wood of the walls like an ephemeral scream—no, not a scream: a falsetto, fallen just flat—
echoing, unheard by Jack’s ear but, for those who believe in it, ringing against his intuition,
an instinctual reaction against some mnemonic smell, the dry taste of Danny’s wine, the
texture of the wood, the touch of that deixic sliver, all sense compiled into a fragment of
something larger, not terrible but terrifying, the contrast of its energy transforming the bar
into a microscope slide of Mundane Space, a little bit of light, a little bit of life, a little bit of
Time.
So quick it grazed his groping fingers, reality bandaged its wound, its lifeblood sealed
safely within like an unspilled, unspoken parable, deeper down than southern Space, below
God’s floorboards, like water, which, till all’s been made flat, will never cease to move:
tooming, just waiting to burst open.

—Would prefer never to grow so old.
—How does Old Man Jack bear it?
—so much Time Passed, teeming, just waiting to burst.
—Like a bubble:
—Time Passed spills into Time Future
—and they homogenize into
—the eternal present? which Newton calls absolute; pure; deep;
mathematical.
—I’ll just keep my past contained.

“I’m an orphan, too,” said Danny.
“I just never heard from them,” Jack said. “I never found them. I changed my name.”

—Would prefer never to have been so young.
—How does Danny bear it?
—so much Time Ahead, soaring through him at a constant speed.
—I’ll keep my future brief.

Danny grabbed the bottle of Merlot and motioned to Jack’s glass. Jack slid it across the
bar and Danny filled it up. Jack drank. The wine obscured the taste of the residual scotch.
“Does it taste like scotch?” Danny asked.

—Old Man Jack’s Old Man Scotch.
—Merlot like ink:
—the whole glass turns black.

“Just wine,” Jack said.
“I don’t know how you drink that stuff.”
“Same way I drink this,” Jack said, sipping it. “It’s all the same thing.”
—Scotch like Wine Passed.

—Wine like Scotch Passed.
“I guess you’re right,” said Danny, finishing the glass and then the bottle. He withdrew
an old black wallet and put two twenties on the counter. “It’s all just numbing Time.”
—Numb.
—Numb.
—Numb.
“Numb,” Danny said. “Say numb.”
“Numb,” Jack said.

“Numb.”

“It sounds weird, doesn’t it?”
Danny wrote it on a napkin.
“Is that a word?”
“Numb,” Jack said.
“It wants to be ‘number’.”
—I want to be number.
—More numb?
“You can say that about anything,” Jack said.
—I guess you could.
“What are you doing in Patusan, anyway?” Danny said.

“I’m on my way to Boston to get my landlord’s son from the airport,” said Jack.
“Oh. Where’s he coming from?”
“He’s been in Europe. He’s been travelling. But he just ran out of money.”
Jack imagined Danny in a Greenwich bar, drinking from a bottle of Merlot, enchanted still by the royal grounds, the rose garden, all those zeroes, the maternity ward set aside for Mother Time.
Jack imagined Danny in a Norwegian forest, setting up camp by Sognsvann, taking a naked dip.
Jack imagined Danny boarding a ferry to Lofoten. Danny watched clouds freeze. Danny hitched the new highway. Danny took a train to Narvik.
—No, no,
“You ought to go,” Jack said. “It’s good for the soul.”
“Yeah. Maybe some Time. I’m pretty broke.”

Danny made to pour more wine out of the empty bottle.
“I guess it’s Time,” he said to Jack. “Thanks,” he said to the bartender.
“Go and get some sleep,” said the bartender.
—Yes.
“What about you?” Danny said.
“I’m parked outside.”
“You driving all the way tonight or sleeping in your car?”
—You must vacuum seal your reference frame.
“He doesn’t land till tomorrow,” said Jack.
“Give me a ride home,” said Danny. “Let’s keep drinking.”

—Yes.
They got up and grabbed their coats. Jack nodded to the bartender who responded with a moment of eye contact. After assuming their coats, Jack and Danny left the warmth of the bar in pursuit of a local future.
They each lit another cigarette once outside, beneath the extinguished light, which, as they made to leave the stoop, shuttered back to life for a final moment. Blinking in a spasmodic rhythm, the bulb threatened to go out once more, its instantaneous wakes of light
breaking like waves on Danny’s grey face, his head facing away from the light before it went utterly dark, so with or without illumination his features were hidden from Jack.

“When does his plane land?” Danny asked.

“Noon,” Jack said.

“Why did you leave so early?”

“I was going to spend the night in Boston,” Jack said. “I don’t get to go out too much.”

“I’ve got a spare bed, if you can’t drive.”

The light went out.

Jack and Danny walked around the building to the parking lot, where Jack’s car stood like a broken down chariot. It was a wood-panel station wagon.

—Old Man Jack and his Old Man Car.

Jack got in and unlocked the passenger’s side door. Danny went around and got in and—vacuum sealed the reference frame.

“Left,” Danny said.

—More fundamental to your awareness.

Jack took a left out of the parking lot. Danny rolled the window down.

—Puncture the vacuum seal of your reference frame.

“Keep going till the light,” Danny said. “Then go right.”

—Mundane walks there; Mundane drives home.

He watched October Space fly through October Time. He didn’t think about anything.

Danny number two lit another cigarette.

“Actually, keep going straight.”

—

Clouds cluttered the sky, indistinct against it, lit by a small and hidden moon, which was rising.

Highland Ave, at the light, passed through the windshield and into the rearview mirror, falling backwards into a passed moment at Time’s exact pace, left behind to shrink beside its memory, diminishing into a green yellow red green star, swallowed by the breadth of dark.

Danny leaned out the window like a dog. The wind smoked his cigarette.

Out of the corner of his eye, Jack watched Danny watch each road as it passed, walking down each missed turn with his eyes till it was gone, and then down the next: River Street, Hillside Street, Montgomery Road,

—

Danny laughed.

—

—Birch Street, where Danny’s cousin might have lived when he was young, Danny biking down the road, dropping the bike in the lawn, running up to the door and knocking with the urgency of social exchange only experienced by children—

—Patusan Street, where certainly that unlit building was once a diner, where certainly Danny and his mother and father once frequented, Danny looking down at the menu, (Saturday, early Summer), Danny’s mother suggesting things, “How about the eggs benedict,” Danny just tracing his finger along the laminated paper, looking at the words and their formative symbols, wondering, for a moment,

—What is the relationship between objective reality and information?

—South Street, which passes too quick to see;
Or Salem Street, where young Danny would trick-or-treat, one house gave out king size candy bars, and where in just a few weeks from now a newer, younger Danny might stroll up, dressed like a zombie, dressed like a vampire,

—Dressed like a blood parasite.

—Maudslay Road, where trees stretch deep into the smallest point of perspective, hidden by darkness; where Danny smoked his first cigarette, maybe; or where he’d lay with music in his ears and stare into the sky like his legs hung off the edge of the universe, pivoting radially around his eyes, a Dannycentric model in his own reference frame.

—After all, isn’t everybody at the center of their own reference frame?
   —at least as measured by non-deixic light.
   “This looks like a nice place to grow up,” Jack said.
   “Pretty pastoral, right?”

Vignettes of Danny’s past played in fast-forward all around. Jack’s car like an anglerfish, the headlights illuminating fabricated memories, Jack’s own, perhaps, projected onto the microcosm of Danny’s parallel childhood, his sense of Home, his parents, his friends: like prey, not to the station wagon of course but perhaps to Time itself, memories like sustenance, feeding its growth, greater in proportion as Time Passed catches up with and overtakes the Present.

There is Danny, kicking stones down the sidewalk.
There is Danny, waving at his mother from the bus stop.
There is Danny, eating a granola bar.
There is Danny, spending Mundane Time.

—Alas, that the idiom should choose “spend” as its operative verb.

Danny watched frozen clouds out the window.

As the sliver of moon rose off the horizon, they became more visible. They stretched in parallax; they undulated through air currents, never one likeness, never fixed. They were caught behind tree branches like bugs in a spiderweb, fractured into a cloud mosaic.

There is Danny, walking on the left side of the street, turning onto Old Town Road—
“Go left here,” Danny said, sudden enough that Jack hit the brakes and pulled a sharp turn. “And take the next left in a couple miles.”

Old Town Road was darker and smaller than the last one, no lines painted on its purple asphalt, a steep and densely forested hill hanging over the right side. While the previous road was mostly straight, Old Town twisted alongside the organic boundary of the hill on the right, twisting around couplets of maples, one little bridge over a small stream that fed into the ocean, no streetlights visible in any direction. They drove for several minutes, Danny’s head still out the window, staring into the dark woods, Jack’s headlights like a bioluminescent appendage revealing the Prosaic Space of the forest, which, when dark, one expects to hide all kinds of creatures, full moon doe eyes lit for a passing second, or the form of something, some bobcat, darting from grotto to grove; that darkness promising the presence of an Other, which is always better equipped for darkness than the Self, at least, in the Self’s imagination.

Of course, neither Jack nor Danny saw any trace of life between the trees.
—In sufficient darkness nothing feels familiar.

—In sufficient darkness, everything becomes present.

“You live way out here?” Jack asked.

Danny said nothing. Jack wondered whether the wind swallowed his words.

The alcohol confounded his vision for a moment, and Jack glued his eyes to the road, too drunk to drive without caution, expelling the peripheries of the journey from his mind, wishing the road had painted lines to count, one, two, three, grounding him.

As Old Town Road chased itself deeper into the woods, the opening in the canopy above narrowed to a small fissure, clouds and weak moonlight and glittered stars flowing like a river between the banks of shadow, water like light, shadow like matter, swimming into deltas, into tidepools, caught between branches, a great moving mosaic, fractured into a thousand jigsaw pieces, falling into place between the canopies, frozen in parallax.

—The sky is the sea of the future.

As the moon rose further, the sky became a deep and royal purple.

Danny took one last drag of his cigarette, breathing a fractal dance of smoke into the car, which got caught in the vents and eddied violently out the window, sucked into a whirlwind of diminishing movement.

The distances between trees shrank as Jack drove, a sylvan claustrophobia pressing itself against his throat, sucking his breath while Time itself slowed down, and down, and down, and stopped.

His breathlessness sucked into a Still so quick he would not breathe even if he could.

—If life is measured in singular moments, how does anything change?

—Time’s smallest constituent ought to be defined as a moment, inside of which everything is Still, and does not move.

—Only with the metamorphosis from one Still to the next can anything really occur:

—Time as a stop motion film, each frame (each Still) locked within itself, made dynamic by the previous moment (from whence it sprang)

—or by the following moment (into which it transmutes) suggesting that anything’s identity changes at Time’s quickest pace:

—“Danny,” changing, as quick as Time stands Still.
Danny tried to count Time.
—One, two, three—no,
—one two three—no,
—one two three—no—
—Too small to catch: the Still.
—One would need a very fine net.

Danny looked to the clouds. He counted Time against parallax, compartmentalizing the smallest Stills he could grasp, trying to catch not the movement, but the precise moment in which the cloud occupies an infinitesimally different shape than before.
—in recognition of the mastery of its craft, the Oscar goes to God, for his stop motion film, Duration.

Danny tried and tried to distinguish a single unmoving cloud before it changed, but found no pregnable crack nor crevice unoccupied by the sheer density of Time: its nature, seemingly, to persist.
—Movement is life;
—I heard this, somewhere.

—You’ve got a boat on the water. Every day you replace just one piece of it. After a few years, you think you must’ve replaced just about every single part of the damn thing.
—Would you call this boat the same boat you started with?

—She’ll be recycled into a whole new Her, all new atoms, all new flesh—all but her full moon eyes.

At last, a dim light revealed itself between two distant trees. Slowly, never slowly enough, Jack’s car rolled closer, the letters, illegible, tangential, slowly attaining focus, transmuting through seamless stop motion into distinguishable signs, coalescing into recognizable patterns, information breeding out of arbitrary functions, shapes like blotted nameless symbols signifying, somehow, something: breathing life into shapes, shapes that bestow upon the literate, somehow, knowledge:
—Tobacco, Spirits, Groceries, read the sign.
“Left after the grocery store,” Danny said.

Jack hit his blinker and counted the clicks, like painted lines on the street, one, two, three, approaching the turn.

Feeble light from the grocery store gave color to the shadowy riverbanks of foliage defining the border of the sky’s river, its objectivity defined by negative space.

Illuminated branches, maple wood, bark like the primordial texture of life, expanded out of their singular trunks like fractals, each branch smaller than its progenitor, ascending in count as they diminished in size, reaching for the fullest volume of sunlight, tomorrow.

Between illuminated borders, caught in the ever shrinking punctures in positive space, fragments of clouds seemed to be swallowed up entirely, jigsaw puzzles dissected further into a million needlepoint pieces of singular colors, deep and royal purples, small as pixels, smaller than pixels: no crack nor crevice unoccupied by the sheer density of Space.

Danny watched clouds scatter into pixels, frozen in Stills, distributed like glitter through the canopy of colored leaves, black against the remote light.
—It’s only light that makes darkness so dark.
Danny saw light invoking darkness.
He felt Jack begin a left hand turn, twelve, eleven, ten—
The force of the turn pressed Danny up against the passenger’s side door.

Jack pulled the car around the bend. The new road looked even older than the last, crowded with potholes, asphalt seals, all purple, deep and royal.

The absence of trees that at one Time would have obscured the sky river, but which had been removed for the construction of the grocery store, made space for one discreet cloud to move, in parallax, towards the right of Danny’s vision.

Jack began to straighten the wheel.

—Nine, ten, eleven….

A vacant building and parking lot stood to his left.

Upon the chime of the grandfather clock—
—Old Man Jack’s Old Man Clock—
the straightened wheel chiming midnight—
(Danny looked to the digital clock; three hands pointed to quarter of)—
the discreet cloud, pivoting radially to the right of his vision
was caught
between branches,
dispersed into many
singular shards
which froze:
one discreet cloud
defined by infinite Stills:

—Caught!
—the progenitorial Still
—from whence everything sprang
—and broke into children like dirt into leaves of grass:
—One discreet cloud, scattering into Stills, pixels, and eventually,

The unlit building passed from the driver’s side window into the driver’s side mirror.

—into noise.

Between one moment and the next, the cloud had changed.
Danny looked back, through Jack’s mirror, at the past.

“What?” Jack asked, feeling Danny’s stare.
Danny looked back out his window.
The road carried on, northeast as all roads do.
—In sufficient darkness, all roads end where noon is June and every day is Christmas.
—Where the air’s so cold it froze Time itself.
—In sufficient light, they'll take you as far as the coast.
“Take a left up here,” Danny said.
Slowly, the road opened up, the presence of civilization promised by one stroboscopic
streetlight, flickering over the brush, illuminating Life’s groping direction, reaching for the
greatest volume of sunlight: tomorrow.
At a stop sign, Jack turned left.

“I think we’ve gone in a circle,” said Jack.
Danny laughed.
In the passenger’s side mirror, the impression of the bar stood, unlit, slipping backwards,
stretching Space, as fast as Time’s quickest pace.
In the distance, a green yellow red green star conjured itself out of the breadth of dark.
“Take a right on Highland,” Danny said.
Just as Jack rolled up to the red star, it became green.
Jack and Danny moved monologically forth, their broken down chariot pulled by the
gravity of Danny’s Apartment towards Blueberry Lane, first left, into the first gravel
driveway on the right, where Jack’s headlights like a bioluminescent appendage shone against
the shell of Danny’s Apartment.
He put the car in park and pulled the keys out of the ignition, headlights swallowed
whole.
—No guests, no light.

—The carapace of a Home: a Text wrought from its Tale.

“Welcome,” said Danny. Jack watched him stumble, drunk, across the gravel, squinting
through the darkness, until his hands met the side of his house.
“There’s Incitatus,” said Jack, looking up at a window on the second floor. A black cat
stared beyond them, its silhouette made visible by a dim bedroom light behind it.

“There he is,” Danny said. The symposiarch.
—Time’s slowest pace.