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Hymn to the Left Hand

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HYMN TO THE LEFT HAND

I was born on the Barrer River
And raised from Blue Ash, Ohio.
Now I uproot myself, moving
Where "Mystery Train" is my anthem
And the state bird is a pig.

You know me by my birthmark:
Three stripes of blood on either arm,
A blazon of pain. Each nurse
Would shriek and drop me in the crib
Where I rocked all night like a fever.

I whistle the payment up beneath my heels;
I grunt till the clouds pump rain.
When the light vowels spring from my tongue
Like the tip of a switchblade, the crows
Blink and pull in their greasy wings.

This heartbeat is a warning, a footstep
Over frozen ground. The blind veins
Tunnel from neck to fingertip;
The scrotum strokes back and forth,
Keeping time between my slag-pile thighs.

The way I take a woman, I could
Be coiled in chains and still
Strike myself against her like a matchhead,
The vows now spurting into smoke,
The rings now fused around my wrists.

And here I will build my house of brick,
Only a crack open for the traffic
To gaze through at the new beast,
For the cheap tours that would yearn and cancel
The holidays of the left hand.