

Santee Frazier



*VENTILATOR*

in your grip  
                  a lighter  
thumb & flint  
sparking to flame  
blankets ablaze  
                  muted fire of fabric

---

they leap a puddle  
                  dome bellied  
                  sticky with pop  
plum dark feet & ankles

---

Cranium crammed  
                  through the windshield.  
T-bird bottomed-out  
                  in a ditch —  
dash still lit,  
                  school of cans  
                  scattered across the seat

---

television static  
silhouette

his head a bobbing  
like an oil derrick  
hair a wiry frizz  
projected on the sheetrock

—

You see morning sun yellow in splintered wood paneling,  
brass hands of clock blistering rust.

Pinto beans,  
cornbread, salt meat melted into the juice —  
yellowing the mash. mustard  
Can shaped meat,  
fried in bacon grease. sliced,

—

you stuff balled up socks between  
floor and door  
so drunk jams his foot

—

Through almond shaped mask holes,  
shirt off, jeans unbuttoned, work boot for pillow. pulsating lips wet with snoring,  
Gashed knuckles, burn scar shaped like a three pronged fork

on the round of his shoulder, cheeks cratered, nose shiny, fungal.  
School of cans, ashtray spired orange — it is halloween,  
the trailer house lit dim blue, outside

leaves scatter

applause.

—

On your knees, swiveling on a stool, scan your face in the neck of a whiskey  
bottle, glowing in  
grime.

It is Easter, your kin clacking billiards  
gulping down pickled eggs & beer.

You stand at a pinball machine mashing the flippers —  
the deep ding of steel

the ball slicking its way across the plastic  
carnival in a box

like the sound of bees popping in a paper bag.

Projected on the back-glass, your face and Dolly's lit up  
like gospel, hoot and stomp, echo in the tavern. The juke  
bright against the cinderblock, "THE FORGET IT"

— blinking pink neon.

—

Through almond shaped mask holes you see a dim lit bathroom,  
small hexagon tiles,

black and white, patterned to shape  
a walkway,

the stalls boxed and beamed wood.

On your tippy toes, neck out stretched,  
you see, a projected on the mirror,  
scribbled on a paper plate,  
crosshatch of screech owl's face,  
tied to your head with fishing twine.  
With your finger find where crayon meets paper,  
eye holes cut jagged with an razor blade.

---

Iron glowing in the dim – the trailer house skewered by smoke pipe —  
walls smeared by greased up hands  
sink overflowing with crusty pans.

Your ear to the floor, you hear cars shadowing a scene on curtains —  
chrome & glass shaking the trailer tin.

Ear to the floor one eye in the crack of the door you see a curling iron,  
empty pack of Kool,  
bits of crumb & toenail  
pools of wax, red as lovemaking — the smell of mucus & salt.

---

Nomads in the city peddling jailhouse scrawls of silver and gold  
wigwams.

---

can in the fist

showers the Midas  
he watches the blistered  
brass  
                  clock hands strike  
hours by slipping  
a stripped gear  
                  dull tick of veneer  
lonesome as setting a fire  
with match & antifreeze

when the brick glows blue  
bright  
                  the night  
slashing concrete  
swallowing up store innards

RED OAK

RED OAK

RED OAK

blinking atop  
shingles  
                  squalid  
against a plywood roof  
spire dim & muggy

snap of wing  
                  snap of exoskeleton  
on glass  
                  the town sleeps  
to the falling creek

when the dawn comes down  
what rotgut will be chugged  
where vomiting is concerned  
in the echo of latrine

scrawls of yardbirds his ledger  
carwashes

distant worlds  
blue as mist  
blue as tv  
shadow boxes  
shadow of mist  
deadeye glowing  
white in the socket  
grunting his face  
in the puddle  
can clutched  
praying  
in the puddle humming  
his innards loose  
in the stockyard  
were grass gnarls  
a carburetor  
half  
wrenched  
from an eggshell junker  
the factory  
jutting  
jogging  
corn niblets down  
a snaking ring  
gears  
no face in the dime shine  
of can  
no face in the puddle  
under the florescent awning  
of SUPER S  
fried burritos glowing  
orange grease on a storefront  
window  
gnashing his elbows into  
atop his hips  
too blanked



to arrest  
          kidneys boiling  
in Night Train  
the path of pebbles  
that makes road  
                    the rain  
crunching the can  
                    rain  
thumping his jacket  
                    rain  
eating the dust  
                    rain & road

hawking at the bits in his pockets  
tooth scraping grime from his nails

find his head jammed into the crevice  
of a dually

                    a brain smashed  
  gold  
sack to his grill  
                    ventilator uncrunched  
lips to spectacle  
knuckles  
                    canaled by Midas

—

yonder the far flung pint  
huddled in flies  
amalgam of lip spit  
                    corn shine

long gone  
                    the dim glow

slit eyes  
    clamant mask  
carved by sun  
    & pucker  
moss hair  
    hyde veined finger tip  
joyous empty jaw  
    mangled  
blanked out  
    hinging  
his bones  
    clogging  
a lark like summons  
    a stomp  
barefoot trounce  
    on musky weeds

rail track slumber  
    tar rock pillow  
smoldered turn in his coat

bean scum  
    face  
an engine  
a freight whining steel

gold speckled neck  
    on the rail  
rolling head

—

stark is the wood stove in the dark  
its bulbous hull a womb  
    of popping embers

simmering corn filling the house  
with a nutty perfume

what sounds but guzzle  
of a pumped well  
the gushing water against the metal

stark is slowness  
                                scything of grass  
chucking grain toward  
chickens  
                                low bark of hounds

gnats backlit by the sun  
  their flight pattern  
scattered in gold

song of exoskeleton  
zoom of the june bug's wings  
  lifting itself  
from the screen door  
and off to the damp night

far away roar of tire  
bucking junk in the truck bed

slow sputter and buzz  
of a mower echoed in the gully

the radio whispering  
a piano that vibrated  
  gospel  
when it uttered

—  
In the mirror I see how your mouth made vowels  
when you sang into a mug of lager. Always in the dim  
misted window light — a gush in the throat — some memory  
under your wrinkled brow.

Not eggs in the grease.

Not flame under skillet, but glowered lips gripping the strike,  
minnow-shine in the divots of your forehead — sunup shading  
craggy, punched sheetrock — my cheek scraping the balding  
linoleum, crumbs of bacon and black pepper under the rust  
speckled stove.

Not the stereo humming the trailer tin,  
no “poor man’s dollar” hollered to the pounding of biscuit doe  
shaking rain down the window, just a wild grimace in the dark.  
In the evenings watching your hair bounce  
until all I could see  
was the dark, and the swallows of flat beer numbed me to sleep.

Looking at our faces I realize this isn’t much, that all I have to offer  
is isolation, that deep ringing in the inner ear.

Thinking of those days,

I imagine melting your records in the slow embers of the wood stove fire,  
watching them burn to black smoke, but this isn’t about anger.  
It’s about our face, my daughter’s too, standing here in the mirror,  
chest to chest, me holding her, twitching and stiff as she brails my lips —  
the black of her pupil a marble burnished with womb, not yet etched  
with dolour — its about your head wrapped in gauze, face stitched  
nose to cheekbone, the hum of ventilator filling the room.