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CONTENTS

Stars in the Elements Are Falling 1

Yet in My Dreams I'd Be Nearer 3
Angels to Beckon Me 4
Age After Age to Be Nearer 5
Though Like the Wanderer 6
No Less Days to Sing 8
My Rest a Stone 9
Sun Moon and Stars Forgot 11
No Sorrow Heaven Cannot Heal 13
Steal Away Home 14
Darkness Be Over Me 17
Hour I First Believed 18
Green Trees Are Bending 19
Out of My Stony Griefs 20
There Let the Way Appear 21

another river on the other side 23

Which the Morning Stars Began 31
Light of the Straying 33
Still All My Song Shall Be 35
Come to the Feast of Love 36
Whenever Clouds Arise 37
Calls Me by the Lightning 38
When Songs Give Place to Sighing 39

Moon Drips Away into Blood 41

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crowns around the glassy sea 49

Send Me in Mercy Given 53
With My Waking Thoughts Bright 54
Morning by Morning 57
When the Mists Have Rolled Away 58
No Shadow of Turning 60
Sun Gone Down 61
Echoes of Mercy 63

There Ten Thousand Years 67

Sword in Golden Sand 75

Acknowledgments 77
Notes 79

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STARS IN THE ELEMENTS ARE FALLING

By this light it's as if the sea is in the attic:
rocky shore along slanting floorboards still water
broken by panels of pine island of a door

man cast-off at sea Or just you on a wall
of unfinished portraits *This ain't no place for the living*
So let's burn it all down *That's a start*

You're talking nonsense And yet *There are places*
told without telling is how Nana put it
squinting her sepia green eyes and tossing

her copper-colored curls But this is the best light
where they painted the sea with wild indigo—
to fool away as we were told the evil spirits

Came to nothing Now nothing turns azure in late morning sun
And you're darker than I am Why should that matter?
See how your skin is whatever this place needs it to be?

Now heather Now cornflower Now a lightless shade of
ghost song nightwashed and scumbling Seawind
muffles your voice And though the sea has been

finally what it always is as of late it keeps burning
Soon the light will be too much for working
so we'll retreat downstairs with the sea above our heads

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YET IN MY DREAMS I'D BE NEARER

Made you gumbo for dinner but as usual you down
whiskey and Celexa then reel to bed by winter dusk

security uniform still damp on your skin By 3 a.m.
stirred by reflux you unfurl from the sheets lurch

to the bathroom lock the door and once nothing more
rises there's the flush the sink the swill then the door

moaning open backlighting your sandy hair electric
your sweaty shirt diaphanous your angular body abstract

We find each other's eyes just before you switch off the light
Let me make you some tea *Fuck off* You cross the room

and skulk into the hall I roll to the ridge of the bed
occupying your spot and mine Yours gravely cold Mine

hot but cooling And I doze overpainting the harder parts
of love: the still of the small hours that isn't still at all

like when hope feels like knowing but knowing is nothing more
than faith So I cast my prayers like smoke then all goes blank

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ANGELS TO BECKON ME

Moonlight filters through wrinkling panes Now
is the rasping hour: hoary house that quiet as it's kept

can't keep quiet I tease your drying skin with ochre
Who's that supposed to be? I haven't decided yet

Exposed and still posing you lean from the chair
left arm braced on splayed thigh right arm descended

lissome fingers slipping a winter sock over your calf
Behind you sill to luminous space hall to elsewhere

shadows of unseen objects looming from within reaching
for the plaid shirt and black denim hung neatly on a hook

I look away not to the canvas but to my paintbrush
swilling sullied water There's no use in eyeing each other

not now after all we've seen tendered documented
after your body opened onto me a world not yours

but mine a world of sealight and winter roses a world
made home through memory but the journey back to you

back to me is in the brushstrokes What of you
did the canvas claim? Surging contours? Blue-gray smoke?

And what of me? Bermuda grass? Tattered robes?
Neither you nor I may cross into light without sacrifice

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AGE AFTER AGE TO BE NEARER

oil on canvas

The figure reclines on a battered chaise lounge, propping himself with his left arm. The skin along his right-side folds where the ribcage presses on the hipbone. His spine curves down to supple cheeks that turn to wiry legs. The right bends over the other, casting everything beneath it in shadow: the hamstring, the crease behind his knee, the calf, until out of darkness emerges the left sole. Before him, French doors and fluted columns. Beyond that, cloudlight funnels onto an island of bayou sand and sleeping hibiscus, darkened by wild oaks. With his eyes closed and face in profile, he holds his chin to clavicle, nose to underarm, breathing his own musk.

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THOUGH LIKE THE WANDERER

You moor us onto an islet
where a swamp rat toddles to its burrow
Feigning courage I call your name
as two red-tailed hawks
drift on the horizon
then vanish behind water tupelos

What's the catch of the day?
Bluegill sunfish
Will you help me with the bait?

Our pirogue
gently sways on the water
its copper mirrors
too tarnished to reverse our faces

What if I fall overboard?
Let me teach you to swim
What about alligators?
I brought my pistol

We cast our lines in silence
as clouds make and unmake themselves
subject to winds that take what's theirs
and what isn't

like when shadows will lift us away
to a place we call home
both nowhere and everywhere:

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winding lake looming wood
blinding sky a little wind
those clouds and their turning
how turning to is turning from
moving on sometimes
only to turn back again *Look!*
But what about . . .? *I'm taking you home*

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NO LESS DAYS TO SING

We still reek of cayenne and paprika from that crawfish boil
Even the sheets need washing You turn your face toward mine

but close your eyes lids twitching fingers laced
beneath your cheek I sidle closer and kiss your arm

I'm done But— *Just let me be* as afternoon sun
declares itself and buries us in light Soused from humidity

I see a wasp nest drooping beneath the eaves like a bale of scrolls
stout workers drifting in unison their shells black as habits

their hums like hymns without lyrics And I join them
vibrations spreading across my chest round my throat rising

with each modulation *What are you trying to sing over there?*
Just moaning like these wasps outside the window *You know*

my shrink makes house calls for emergencies Just listen With a huff
you gyrate onto your back I stay my cheek on your belly

sweat trilling along your iliac furrow while you comb my downy hair
What now? Moan for me *Yeah right* Follow my lead

Then we echo each other until I can't tell your moans from mine

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MY REST A STONE

Come June
we eat peaches for water

We know they're sweet
when brown craters
press into their flesh
balanced on the cusp
between ripe and rot

We eat our peaches
straight off the tree

Keep pulling I wrench
and fruit yields
See the cheeks? Yes
The slit? Yes *Lick it*

The cheeks are fuzzy and moist
on my tongue
from the morning dew

Bite it I laugh
at how need
can sound like ruin

Mist coats the air
round my face
and juice erupts
on my chin trembling
so sweet and uncertain

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Who said you could stop?
Sinking back in
my thrust of jaw
sends nectar falling
to the tip of my collar
where it spreads itself freely

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SUN MOON AND STARS FORGOT

Fireflies glister in swarms
as the river purls at our feet

Come to the feast of love come ever knowing

The rum sting of your breath
sours the air between us

Your fingers weave
through the darkening sky
as if to conduct a choir
but you have no singers
only yourself
so the burdens of a man
not called but sent
all gather in your hands

Let's go back inside
Fuck that house
But we've been out here since noon

You plod downstream
frisking like a spider in rain
until you stay your feet
still swaying in the dark
and look up at bald cypress trees

Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal

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laughing at your own folly
scaring off a family of mallards

You tug through the fly
your drooping sex
relieving yourself
in the reeling water
broken by your amber torrent
endless
until it ends
until the stones flit beneath your feet
and you plummet onto your back
hair soaked in your own piss

So this is what we came for?
What else is there?

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NO SORROW HEAVEN CANNOT HEAL

oil on canvas

The figure crouches along the bank like a cougar, pelt streaked with mud and sand. With skeins of hair coiling at his shoulders, he dips his cupped hands into the water. His manhood, sinking from hair as dense as shadow, is barely flaccid, going down from use or coming up for some unrevealed impression—its secret is in the swell, in the blood. Eddies gather on the stones. Duckweed drifts by. Behind him, a campfire rises like a cumulus of rose petals, reaching beyond bald cypress trees, reaching for the moon, a ghost in evening light, soon to be again made whole at dusk.

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STEAL AWAY HOME

Midsummer's an impasse
rank and sullen
but River Road
is a mouthless prayer

You live a life aquatic
water to your chest
humming day to dusk

I take you plein air
when heat allays
the lines of your face

Keep still
He calls me by the thunder
And what does He say?
I ain't got long to stay here

scoring soft the skin of the river
drumming your fists
along the bank

Sand thickens our breath
as we wander ourselves
far out of mind illusions
coming as they please going
when they must

Nightfall Hazy stars

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And suddenly rising
into back crawl
you're *The Dying Slave*—
lips unpursed
lids untensed
index finger loose
on tethers leading nowhere
(this is more
than surrender but
not quite abandon
like how the river grass
still leans for dusk)

You seem all theory
dazed and slow
in the rippling dark

Don't let me lose control again

Because only when done
by studied hands
can dying as a slave

(unbound
and still
a slave)

appear undoubtedly
as joy
. . .

The way home wilders
with fireflies
as your body sopping
leans into mine

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I'll learn to capture
someday how you've been:
an underlife cut from stone
held in chains like silk

(continued...)

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