

Eisegesis 1 (a-d): Sun Dial

a. We went to get our weekly groceries on a different evening than usual.

The girl at the pharmacy was wearing a Chicago sweatshirt but had never been to Chicago.

b. How did my wife know I would like that video about the goat lost in Kansas City?

Yesterday was the Great North American Eclipse. We got a partial. I did not witness it. I believed the science.

c. We put up the replacement orange patio umbrella.

It was a regulator of sorts, an attempt to stop time completely by looping it around itself. We failed.

d. I stir-fried the garden that night. We took a gummy. Seemed like a beginning.

Sprayed the counter with industrial cleaner, turmeric lifts from yellow to rust, makes a little sunset as it rises.

1a. We went to get our weekly groceries on a different evening¹ than usual.

The girl² at the pharmacy was wearing a Chicago³ sweatshirt but had never been to Chicago.

My life was becoming too routine, and I was not getting enough time behind the keys, which is what I called writing. The writing was important, but I did not resemble the phrase I often heard other writers express, that they would die if **they couldn't do it⁵**, which was the kind of grotesque hyperbole writers should avoid. I was not an academician, nor did my job relate fully to writing, so to do the creative part was a forced arrangement and getting more difficult to keep in my habits, and yet it was essential for leveling me emotionally. Like the unexpected disappearance of Chicago and some of my family's inhabitation elicited by the technician's choice of clothing, when I did not spend time thinking about the imaginary, it made me uncomfortable, anxious, resentful, and I just sort of turned into **an ass⁶**. I knew this, but often too late. Chicago represented suddenly that imagined life of the creative contemplation and made me realize I was neglecting the keys again. But it also reminded me of **negative capability⁷**, which I think of as essential in writing, even as I write about myself. It is a character I create who is obscured by the words and yet informed by them, this fictional consciousness, which allows me to confront a version of the truth. Further, the Chicago sweatshirt disrupted my routine, because it made me think about these things. Disruption of the routine or pattern results in creativity.

¹**different evening**: disruption of pattern

²**girl**: female pharmacy technician

³**Chicago**: I assume this to be reference to the place, not the band. Both of my sisters live in Chicago and if I am lucky, I get to visit. But I miss them, as I am living in the East myself⁴. It is a city one cannot imagine fully, unless one lived there. But like the ostrich who buries its head in the sand, the technician gave me a little object-permanence anxiety, as if the city didn't really exist but in my mind, and therefore, my sisters disappeared, as all of my connections to my family seemed to disappear as I aged.

⁴Richmond, Virginia

⁵**they couldn't do it**: Writers write, but even when they are not doing it, they are doing it and if you understand this then you are probably a writer. If so, I pity you.

⁶**an ass**: My belligerence often stemmed from drinking too much, and I drank so as to avoid the physical act of writing. A waste of time, the drinking, which always resulted in feeling guilty and terrible about how I acted. I'm not sure I will ever learn my lesson, which I know by heart.

⁷**negative capability**: accepting paradox without resolution

1b. How did my wife know I would like¹ that video² about the goat lost in Kansas City?

Yesterday was the Great North American Eclipse. We got a partial. I did not witness it³. I believed⁴ the science⁵.

The goat is not an acronym for the greatest of all time, which is a way of thinking that the current culture defaults to, but an actual goat, this one the mountain dwelling sort. My wife told me animals acted weirdly during an eclipse, and we had been encouraging our weird hound dog, Clementine, to embrace the opportunity, but she slept through it. The goat had escaped from someone's apartment where it was kept like a dog. The video captured it under a steep embankment beneath a downtown city bridge. Nobody could get to it, but it was in its safe place, which appeared perilous to us as it was on the tiniest ledge braying at the black star of the eclipse. I should not have written "**believed**"⁴ the science. This word should have been "knew," but I only barely understood the concept of galactic mechanics. I am playing with the tension between science-based reality and superstition. Here was time itself, I remember thinking, passing, and we along with it. Much of the culture who claimed itself godless and science based was actually more superstitious than ever. We were devolving and I think only older folks could see this happening, for you had to be alive long enough for progression to reveal regression. Still, I had trouble conceptualizing that the solar system was also on the move, in fact, at incredible speed, with all the little planets spinning round the diamond tip of the drill, the sun, plunging through **eternity**⁶.

¹I only assert this because it works in my relationship, but so much seems dependent on small acts of kindness. To realize that someone, beyond all that could distract is thinking about me—is very powerful and nearly always surprising.

²**video:** Current culture is addicted to short digital media clips, which cause a universal need to be distracted and entertained; because the individual mind is more fragmented than ever, the collective is as well. Patience, logic, education, and development are all out of style. With the harnessing of AI, we will be even less accountable to our personal intellectual development. Work and productivity will change dramatically over the next two decades.

³**witness it:** Unlike the goat and most everyone else in the path of the eclipse, I was working in my office.

⁵**science:** One did not need to be capable of doing the math that proved or predicted astrodynamics to be certain of its theory.

⁶**eternity:** even when we feel stagnant, we are still moving, I don't necessarily believe that every movement is an advance, especially when it comes to marriage or any type of addiction behavior. The galaxy is a molecule, the culture is the self.

1c. We put up the replacement¹ orange patio umbrella².

It was a regulator³ of sorts, an attempt to stop time⁴ completely by looping it around itself. We failed.⁵

¹A small fitting had broken on the old one and I probably could have fixed it, but when I fixed things they were never totally right. My house was built in 1927 and no longer had any right angles. Therefore, replacement to anything on the interior needed to be bespoke. For example, the heating source was what they called a gravity boiler, which to my knowledge, no longer exists in North America. There are homes in Oregon Hill here in Richmond that still heat by burning wood in stoves and the entire neighborhood has an ashy glow in winter light. When you slept in one of these houses, your skin absorbed the odor of smoke. The guy I pay to maintain my boiler is named Jimmy Golden of the Golden Flue. He hates confined areas, in which he finds himself regularly, and he is afraid of snakes, which he sees semi-regularly. He stands at the boiler with me and looks on in wonder at the mechanism of a worn-out age, an age in which he, past a decent retirement age, can remember himself as a child. He became emotional once and told me, as if a man passing along a family value, “We live in a disposable society. Never get rid of this boiler.” One day, arriving home from work, Mr. Golden and one of his helpers were up on my roof working, standing casually at the peak, next to the chimney. He was very small. I saw him hold his hands in the air and the helper reached down and lifted him until Mr. Golden was sitting atop the chimney mouth. He plopped him up there as if he were a child, and the clime unthreatening. He peered into the mouth. It was badly decayed. Escaping carbon monoxide had that effect on brick.

²**umbrella:** May not sound better than “cantilevered deck canopy” but more universally recognized by suburbanites.

³**regulator:** A type of clock with a pendulum made popular by old railroad stations, due to their accuracy. My neighborhood was originally built for people connected to the Richmond rail industry.

⁴**stop time:** The meditative, reflective moment lives outside of time. A closed canopy is a spear that turns into a sundial whose shadow spins round it, though this can only be seen incrementally.

⁵**we failed:** To stop time is to fully realize the situation of life we find ourselves in, or to take advantage of the sense of carpe diem, or even feel imperiled by our own passing. Like many, we fell under the spell of timelessness and immortality that was myth, just as the construct of self was a myth. We believed in constructs that were not true because they gave us a sense of order and meaning.

⁶**Jimmy Golden⁷** told us his greatest fears. Once, working underground of a Fan apartment, in some slummy VCU student complex, all the lights cut while he was in a conduit tunnel, a kind of grave, halfway between buildings. He worried: *Would anyone know he disappeared?*

⁷I still owe him for my last bill. I hadn’t seen him since the pandemic when I called to pay it. His office has made no response.

1d. I stir-fried the garden. We took a gummy. Seemed like a beginning.

Sprayed the counter with industrial cleaner, turmeric lifts from yellow to rust, makes a little sunset¹ as it rises².

One makes decisions in one's life to force-consume³ a little bit of pleasure which is fun because it inspires a break from routine, in the middle of the work week. But a wandering mind is not great for the now of domestic life. Still, something had changed, some new feeling came over me much in the same way that a front is often undetectable: when it arrives or as it leaves. And just as we are surprised that it has alighted, it makes a spell as it widens⁵, and next you know, you're on your knees at the bottom of some **coastal shelf**⁶ and you realize you are being abandoned⁷. Someone does not love you as they once had. And why would they? Haven't you changed? Shouldn't you be changing? That is the whole point of **the deal**⁸. You make a decision and you dig in. I would rather be loved differently every hour if I could, but just so long as it lasts at least for **eternity**⁹. I don't even know what I want or need anymore. I am very aware of what others say I should want and need. Die free or live. Domestic effort should go unseen. The sealed **countertop**¹⁰ was sprayed heavily because I thought I'd stained the marble. It was that brilliant mustardy turmeric, but the antibacterial pulled it up and altered its composition, turning it all to garnet pigment. I was saying goodbye to the visual world. I laid disposable towels over it until it absorbed, blossoming into the paper, and I threw it away. I cooked too much that night and overcooked the snow peas. I cranked the music as I worked later, amazed at the skill it must have taken to create and perform. Even if you were **deaf**¹¹, you could hear the music.

¹**sunset as it rises**: night and day

²**as it rises**: turmeric is acidic. This color change is due to a slight change in configuration of the molecule.

³We were in the golden age of legalization, though there was still significant black market action. This gummy was commercially packaged and shipped. It wasn't that *expensive*⁴.

⁴Larry Levis poem, "In 1967": Anybody with three dollars could have a vision / And who wouldn't want to know what it felt like to be / a cedar waxwing..

⁵Larry Levis book: "The Widening Spell of the Leaves"

⁶**coastal shelf**: I had just memorized Philip Larkin's poem "This Be the Verse"

⁷**abandoned**: Interpretation of essay, *On Courage* by Louise Gluck in book: "Proofs and Theories."

⁸**the deal**: existence

⁹**eternity**: outside of time, in the way Aquinas approached it, not forever or for a very long, long time which is a measure. Eternity is about being outside of time.

¹⁰**countertop**: You should seal your marble countertop at least every other year with a permeator to protect it from stains. I was running a bit behind on that task and the seal was likely weakened by time.

¹¹**deaf**: I was going blind. No cure.

Eisegesis 2 (a-d): Domesticus

a. I wanted to tell her something, but she was watching the boat show.

*Reality television seems scripted to me but honestly, so
does much of life. We attend a bat mitzvah.*

b. The forget-me-nots I transplanted two years ago finally blossomed. I erred & mowed half.

*I forgot they might show up. As did the bluebells,
abundantly, as if we had made something of the weeds.*

c. My wife was heading to work but called me outside to show me something beautiful.

*The observation is never mutually precise. Rather, what
should be trusted is the one who attempts to share it.*

d. A hornet was trapped in the window casing. I sprayed it with reverence to Easter.

*Overheard in the hospital waiting room: an older couple
talking too loudly about being ready for the End of Days.*

2a. I wanted to tell her something¹, but she was watching the boat show².

Reality television seems scripted to me³ but honestly, so does much of life. We attend a bat mitzvah⁶.

³The non-essential phrase “to me” helps the tension of the line and allows the phrase to play multiple roles, for it implies that reality television is reality and reality is my own life as a scripted entertainment piece. You can’t really know someone else’s script, not really. But you can **begin to learn**⁴ your own. And it ain’t all good, but you try to move through it, intransigent though it be. The word “honesty” counterbalances an implied inauthenticity. But which is better? Perhaps part of reality is simply our ability to **act a role**⁵. All of us hide a little, but a healthy marriage reveals everything and plunges deeper still and ultimately never tires of this process at self-discovery through discovery of other. But again, the enemy here is failure of undertaking the process every conscious second, picking up the coal before dousing the fire and taking it forward into the night to the next encampment. Part of this is describing our dreams, our unconscious visions and aspirations to improve, to do more, change, discover. But no marriage could survive processing all the time, at least not at the same level of intensity. Little breaks are needed, a natural indifference, troughs, small streams of escape through the dry times. We remember being drunk with love. Earnest praise and sense of gratitude arise, coupled with experience of years, there could be no stronger trust. We come together again, as if to ask, no matter what we otherwise say: *What has the distance given us? What have we learned?* We set our tent against the darkening winds of our deaths. We set our glowing coal in the campfire’s cold nest. If we’re lucky, it comes alive. If we’re lucky, stars spin furiously about us.

¹**tell her something**: This is the main barrier of good marriages, the little bit of poison in the pudding, that we fail to communicate our dreams, whether out of fear, bad timing, or because one side is not listening or the other is not talking. But part of the problem is longevity too and familiarity. It’s the same effect that regular language has on poetry. We get so used to words and over-use them. They become predictable and lose import. The language dies. The meaning is simplified to surface information and confined there forever.

²**boat show**: *Below Deck Mediterranean*, ETV, episode in which a male crewmate tells a female crewmate that she is a bitch, to which “the bitch” replies, “You don’t know me.”

⁴**begin to learn**: Perhaps the reason that reincarnation exists as wishful thinking: We are only beginning to enlighten.

⁵**act a role**: The lives of professional actors must be truly confusing.

⁶**bat mitzvah**: Jewish girl’s entry into the tribe. An obligation to attend. To stand before relatives and say, *This is who I am. This is my life and how I’ve squandered it.* No matter how scripted rituals are, family reveals all the connections. This stanza signals intimacy erupting within deadening mundanity. This is, in part, the strategy of the entire poem.

2b. The forget-me-nots¹ I transplanted two years ago finally blossomed. I erred & mowed half.

***I forgot they might show up. As did the bluebells²,
abundantly³, as if we had made something of the weeds⁴.***

⁴***Made something of the weeds*** would be a bit trite were it not for my history with mowing⁵. It's also interesting that our yard produces things from time to time that I thought were failures or which went the way of the vole. One year I put 80 bulbs into the ground and only got two scrawny hostas to poke out. But things continue to surprise as we tumble through the years. Also that we "made" it happen between us. It's not always sunshine and butterflies. It has the connotation of a work of force but also of creativity. That we were makers, constantly renewing our lives, that we were creating this relationship as we went, and must create and recreate it. What is the blossom? Nothing that has practical use. Just a little flare of color that stays a short season, yet through its passing and by its memory might we better endure the winter. I think of them now as a kind of abundance³, near what my marriage means to me. It was really everything. I hindered it, I know, just by being who I am, because I bring so many personal flaws into it. But she endures me. Loves me, even. We were very middle class and would likely stay right where we were all our lives, if we didn't overstay our money. Or become needlessly interrupted by sickness, loss, and death. But the marriage itself was the most important thing to me, and it feels often as if I have too much, more than I deserve or at times can honestly handle. I should let her go. Because of the impending blindness, I worried about turning her into my caretaker. I was scared. I could be alone, but I wanted only her to be alone with. This is a letter to the unspeakable.

¹***forget-me-nots***: I forgot the forget-me-nots.

²***bluebells***: like forget-me-nots and many flowers, they look like weeds when they first start coming up

⁵When I was 17, I got a summer job with a commercial landscaping crew in St. Louis. I cut corporate crannies with a gas-powered trimmer, such as the ditch outside the fence of the GM plant in Wentzville, Missouri. That was some of the hardest work I ever did. It shaped my work ethic in the sense that any job would be easy next to those. One day my supervisor decided it was time to put me on the seated mower. No training. I took off mowing fairly badly. We were cutting the large corporate grounds of Monsanto who made stuff like Roundup fertilizer and pest management products that have sickened and killed so many. My father worked as a research chemist in the detergents division, which is why I grew up in St. Louis and more essentially, why I was at all. I'm mowing this field, hundreds upon hundreds of square yardage, all very tall grass that has an even taller area rising in the middle. I was about finished when I noticed my overseer waving his hands, running sloppily toward me. I shut down the motor. Evidently, I mowed a large plot of genetically modified experimental flowers, hybrids, some of which were enormously expensive to produce. I as fired, of course. It was a blessing.

2c. My wife was heading to work¹ but called me outside² to show me something beautiful³.

The observation is never mutually precise⁴. Rather⁵, what should be trusted⁶ is the one who attempts⁷ to share it⁸.

There are obligations. A little meaningless job tied to another is called a career. The difference between us could be melted down. She did everything in sacrifice of time spent with family. I was more selfish. Both stances took commitment. Endorsement from other successes in our fields. But the field was also ours, shared. I think because my wife and I could not have children on our own, nor assisted by the miracle of modern medicine, there was always a kind of longing that arose as the years laid down, of how we might have been as a father and mother, teaching, learning from that which we taught. Showing someone something new is also new to the one who shares, continuing to be a part of something meaningful that is meaningless to our professional lives and, participating in something of the immortal, it provides a taste of impregnating the ascending generation with value. Fireworks. Every Fourth. The nation's birthday was also my wife's. Hot-dog. Each ritual, a representation of intimate endurance. There is no one to separate us or distract us but ourselves. How has America survived on snouts and hocks wrapped in intestines? If we are lucky enough to trace it in the dark to predict the very next illumination, how could we say the summer night was not for us? Fireflies. To snatch them up and tear their bodies like little lungs of garlic cloves, rub the **neon paste⁹** on our skins, and run around in the dark, having darkened, yet glowing, circling each moment in the yard, cannibalistic, running and screaming, afire with guts, converged and converging.

¹heading to work: The job is the center of American experience.

²outside: I was a man of interiors, parlor games, lampshades.

³something beautiful: It's all tragedy, right? Anything beautiful, even your ideas of beauty. all of it fugacious as microseconds of sand bleeding out before us. The flowers drooping in the vase. The children we never had. Things you love only set you up for loss. It's difficult to see it as anything more than this.

⁴mutually precise: agreed upon

⁵Rather: optionally, in opposition to

⁶trusted: a better word here than *believed*

⁷attempts: to stare in the same direction at beauty or truth but only know it in our remote and particular ways, never totally shared but approximated.

⁸to share it: Because one can never know what is being shared, the beauty is not in the thing but the act, yet only if we are sparked in our observation, if we enter the holiness of beauty by which we are equal in our exposure and exploitation. What is profane, forbidden? Either nothing or everything. What is given us? That we might trust and be betrayed.

⁹neon paste: Bioluminescence in fireflies stems from combining luciferin with oxygen.

2d. A hornet¹ was trapped in the window casing. I sprayed it with reverence to Easter².

Overheard in the hospital waiting room: an older couple talking too loudly about being ready for the End of Days³.

I had been thinking about tragedy lately and not the kind that we could ever learn from, but the type that revealed character and truth. And how essential that was to being human. It admitted this sort of truth: if we were honest, we were doomed. I visited the MLK Human Rights Museum in Atlanta, which gathered all the grotesqueries amid the righteous. It wasn't necessarily about justice. Moreso, it was to admit that the human project had been plagued with remorseless, savage villainy of the few, and they were still and always among us, because they were us. We bore them on the helix. It could say nothing about forced allegiance but warned against cultism. Religious folks seem to want to actively proclaim their excision of this element, and they bring along every other little thing that built it or allowed it to exist. This they call sin. Rather than extolling the virtues of love, they focus on elimination, amputation. But God, who if it is as they say, cannot exist as negation. It is all encompassing creation and death, flourish and diminishment, health and sickness, good and evil. What is the opposite of love? It cannot be hatred. Hatred is but a pressure that shapes love, enables it, and why then would a grand creator want it out of our spirit? I recognized these old Virginians, fretting little over the looming medical procedure of their loved one, proselytizing to us, who they saw as corruptions of god's spirit. And here is my judgement of them: What poor manners. A waste to be with others within the same waiting **room**⁴ and similar predicament and see them as other. They were like vultures praying for and preying on death. The only response was to isolate⁵, to be with the beloved in quiet meditation, exiled.

¹**hornet**: trapped (me) inside the glass box, the interior of the great exterior, isolated, dying, Also, angry as a hornet. Also, the sting of religious superstition dominating the public sphere.

²**Easter**, the victory over brutal death, also marked by Passover, the Last Supper, which at that table sat the 12 distinct personality profiles of the disciples, the strength, the rock, the doubter, the betrayal and so forth. Also, representative of tribal community. Together, separate.

³**End of Days**: the apocalypse preceding rapture—the most unattractive component of Christianity in which my father wholeheartedly believes, that to be spared, all one had to do to be among the chosen was to proclaim that Jesus was the Son of God. It had nothing whatsoever to do with what type of person you were or what was in your heart. Thoughts over acts and, yet, no book in the Bible called Thoughts.

⁴**room**: The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard, "House and Universe" in which he deals with interiors and exteriors, using Baudelaire's *Les Paradis Artificiels*, citing Thomas de Quincey reading Kant in winter on opium.

⁵Baudelaire's "Solitude" in *Paris Spleen* in which he cites Jean de La Bruyère: *That great misfortune of not being able to be alone!*

Eisegesis 3 (a-d): Cortisone

a. I went to an orthopedist for a cortisone injection in each knee.

While I waited, I read an essay, On Courage, by Louise Glück, which I only sort of understood.

b. I took a car and the tattooed driver told me she quit eating meat and that I smelled good.

But I wasn't wearing a scent more than the cool spring breeze, confettied by white petals from little trees.

c. I am driven by forces I do not understand to plant things that do not grow.

*When the cicada song devours the world, we succumb.
We write down the harvest as a loss but for the beauty.*

d. I will make us watch baseball, so help me God. I will breathe it full of fire.

*The conspiracy of the meaningless is to mean. Should
we have sex and say filthy things? Pulled deep but foul.*

3a. I went to an orthopedist for a cortisone injection in each knee¹.

While I waited², I read an essay, On Courage³, by Louise Glück⁴, which I only sort of understood⁵.

⁴Glück seems to me one of the best and last of a shining mid-late-century American poet before poetry became something else, and not better but more chaotic, less trustworthy. We trust nothing now and therefore have no teachers. I realize it's just a phase, a fashion, but it seemed to be very slow moving because it was here, in my time. It seemed to me that being accessible began to outweigh the novel thought. Glück's essays were dense as dark honeycomb. ⁵I tend to read things that challenge my preconceptions of what the language can do and, therefore, sometimes it's too smart for me. At the time I was also rereading Hamlet, which confused, as always, because I did not comprehend the essence of tragedy of circumstance or courage. I feel the crux of Hamlet's motivation are revealed in Act 4, Scene 4, in which he crosses paths with Fortinbras. Perhaps I recognized myself in Hamlet's introspection⁸. I'm a bit thick. I was Midwestern for my formative years and my family did not value reading. We valued sports and hard work. I cannot really remember when I was not on some ballfield. Otherwise, I played alone and watched old movies in the basement. I wish I could claim courage in my own writing. Truth is, I barely manage the little song in me, when it comes. It's what I would do as a way of being alone. The regular beauty of the world was overwhelming to me, especially in the moment of its happening. And there were always those surprises when returning I found some new thing had grown like a weed in the crack of the sidewalk. Looking closer, I realize it held a flower.

¹**cortisone...knee:** a gluey cortisol steroid that suppresses the immune system's natural inflammatory and allergic responses enabling aging, arthritic individuals to walk with less pain. I blamed football in my youth.

²**waited:** there is something to the thoughts one has in a waiting room, a large, shared structure that is both private and public, tribal, and isolated. I usually pretended to read while I scanned the other individuals, trying to find the cannibal.

³**Courage:** is born innate but only arises when fear wisely spreads thy wings. Hamlet was doomed, and though he knew it, he still had to follow through. He was bound and caught by **protecting his values**⁶, without which, he would be no one.

⁶**protecting his values:** even though the alligator could eat just about anything, it limits its diet to just a few things. Posits choice into biological evolutionism. That way, if the climate changes too quickly, as they know it will, it will disappear. Because—fuck that⁷.

⁷My wife and I have a similar pact we call *Ocean Death*. Ocean death happens when the sea dies or just hits the tipping point. The ice sheets melting will kill most people, but ocean death will mark the torturous conclusion of the species.

⁸Rightly to be great... / [is] to find quarrel in a straw / When honour's at the stake.

3b. I took a car and the tattooed driver² told me she quit eating meat and that I smelled good³.

But I wasn't wearing a scent more than the cool spring breeze⁴, confettied by white petals⁵ from little trees.

I am taking a car¹ because I had lost much of my sight and was, therefore, pronounced legally blind. I surrendered my license. I can see right before me, which allows me to read and see through keyholes. Not so bad. But it could devolve into total blindness. I cannot see more than one spot at a time, and I cannot track motion very well, so I am unable to predict motion. I was never very good at it anyway. Still, the darkness confuses me like nothing else. It is like dipping into insanity, rolling down some dark highway and watching yourself in another car, running high speed, parallel, off the shoulder, near the woods, slipping into a ditch and shooting back up, the driver asleep and coming to, suddenly peaking over a ridge, taking flight, lifting above the tree line, as if the purple trees were carrying him/you down some long river of indiscernible proof. I get why Goethe's last words were *More light*⁶. But don't pity the blind. They see things others do not. I think of Milton raging against his honorable niece for making yet another error in his holy recitation⁷. I think of Blind Willie Johnson, blinded by his stepmother, dousing him as a child in boiling lye in the confrontation with her lover, who accused her of infidelity. Love is like darkness. We travel it. We pray it never wakes itself or us. I wake up sometimes in the middle of the night, just like everyone, and what we see there, we are careful to keep quiet. I wake and know that I am not taking advantage of my limited immortality. I know this, yet something keeps me still as a fawn lying in tall grass.

²**driver:** Uber driver, Chantelle

³**good:** Did I smell like meat?

⁴**cool spring breeze:** I worked at a pool hall during college days in Missouri, and the guy who delivered bread in the morning called me Cool Breeze, but he had a name for everyone. We played odd man for a dollar each in which you gathered around the first table and flipped a coin, until only one person had the heads or the tails. That guy got the pot. Bread Man was often lucky.

⁵**petals:** It was springtime in Richmond, Virginia, after an easy winter. You felt privileged. It helped that I could walk. I'm not really playing with the idea of actual sexual infidelity, but I know it's inferred, and I didn't change it. Why? Number one, I didn't feel that I was attractive in any way, especially to anyone younger. Though midlife crisis was not in my cards, any compliment was still invigorating. I felt like the ancient Dublin King, Ivar the Boneless who was held aloft—for though he was physically incapable, they still valued his vision and leadership. I didn't feel capable of deserving admiration. Still I floated on her words.

⁶Goethe really said: *Do open the shutter of the bedroom so that more light may enter*, in German.

⁷Milton was completely blind and recited all of *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, claiming each night an angel "instructed" the text.

3c. I am driven by forces¹ I do not understand to plant things that do not grow².

When the cicada song devours the world³, we succumb⁴.

We write down the harvest as a loss⁵ but for the beauty⁶.

⁷In childhood, my older brother, little sister and I were sent to Kansas to stay with our grandparents. They were frightening when the whole of the peopled world terrified me, but at that time they would also seem quiet, careful and puzzled as if they'd never seen children before. How had my mother ever come from them, and how had she escaped the farm? It was the longest summer ever, though they are longer as a kid. Grandmother forbid the boys entry into the house, though my sister was kept inside, and I would sometimes glimpse her pasty terror from a window. During the daylight hours, the boys were to keep to a quilt grandmother laid out beneath a large tree. Each week, an escape: my brother and I would ride in the back of grandfather's pickup to go into town, collect the mail and groceries, and fill with water the great rusted tank that sat in the bed with us. I recall the gravel roads. We were crowded by the tank and were pushed perilously out on the tailgate. We dangled our legs over, hovering, nearly touching the ground while grandfather drove at breakneck speed. We flew over the little elevations, our hearts jumping into our throats. Once, I reached down a toe and the road blew off my left shoe. It might still be there in a roadside ditch. But aside from those trips and church on Sundays, there was nothing but that blanket and the great shade of the tree, staring into the fields beyond from which the grand engine of cicada turned and growled, unstoppably. At night, like sorrow, they interlocked circuits of their ancient dirge. We only felt this then, but our baby brother was dying in St. Louis.

¹**forces:** the imagination

²**that do not grow:** My family, my marriage, at times. Chasing things and giving up.

³**song devours the world:** it lasted the length of a warm season. We were immersed at the farmhouse surrounded by fields with scrappy trees. Grief was ubiquitous as a swarm of locust. Overwhelming.

⁴**we succumb:** allow it to overwhelm, to enable us to go into the mantra. To hear it until we don't anymore. Also the death that surrounded us as children. Even though we were not given reason, we were sent to Kansas for our extended stay. We knew its terrible name from the wind. It felt like a nearly sexual yearning.

⁵**as a loss:** devoured by locust, even though locust are not cicada, they are often synonymous when it came to the concept of a swarm that threatened our destruction

⁶**beauty:** Keats: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty..." from *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, uttered by the urn itself, I guess. An ironic statement for current culture, which entered into the U.S. presidential campaign.

⁷There is so much of me that is tied up in these initial events of my consciousness that I am only just discovering it as I live. Like the cicada, it forms my inexhaustible, mostly unknowable mythology. Like the horde, it emerges.

3d. I will make us watch baseball¹, so help me God². I will breathe³ it full of fire.

The conspiracy⁴ of the meaningless is to mean. Should we have sex and say filthy things⁵? Pulled deep but foul⁶.

My generation is actually the first that has continuously lived alongside a video generating square: TV, computer, phone. Whatever it is not and cannot provide, we have been emotionally massaged by its messaging, but worse, cut off from the actual world. We allow it dominion, regardless the value. We have accepted the arrangement to ignore and become more ignored by the people who love us. Dante would place those who engage this form of willful ignorance into the middle *malebolge*, somewhere near the bleeding trees of the suicides. ²The mention here of God is used facetiously or to those in the faith, it is uttered in vain, which means “unprofitably” or “without value.” If ever you can imbue the meaningless with meaning, do not hesitate. I don’t care what it is. This is the ultimate survival technique of the utterly bored. A marriage must endure occasional droughts. This scene depicts a common event, though it was laden with the unspoken: that we were not having sex. My insecurities lashed out. There is no passive-aggressive behavior more malicious than ignoring the one I love. So I will force communication by calling the action of the game like some color man in an old radio broadcast. I know this is not the way. The only way out is through yourself. The question should not be whether I am valued by my lover, but do I value myself? I can see it, but I can’t stop. By describing the action on the television, I am describing my own inaction and my frustration. I make a quick, crude gesture into an invitation to sex. I am thwarted. I step into the box for the next pitch, but I have no game.

¹**baseball:** due to my form of blindness, I am unable to watch baseball in person. Rather it fills many televised hours.

³**breathe:** breath of the deity. The word of the deity. Fire is life, wisdom, but also hell. The sentence is a threat to describe what is happening in the baseball game to my wife who is in the room with me, doom-scrolling on her phone. It is a threat to fall into one of my habits which is to praise a thing by testifying about what everything means to me. Analysis. The game, the history of it, games I’ve attended at cathedrals. The interaction between pitcher and batter and the guessing game they play, also based on history. The inside game, which I describe with arrogance. Deflection. A bad habit.

⁴**conspiracy:** a kind of syndrome.

⁵**filthy things:** I tend to use profanity when describing baseball. Also, one of my habits in bed, that I’m a verbal creature and she, more of a listener. Liquid and vessel.

⁶**Pulled deep but foul:** something you hear in baseball commentary that runs through the action like music or a score, describing, educating, alerting us to tense moments or linking moments to history, no matter how meaningless. The batter is early with his swing, has struck the ball well and sent it toward the homerun fence, but it drifts away at the end, going foul into the crowd, meaning little.