

# KILLING THE MURNION DOGS

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This is for Liz—everything for you.

## How to Bring Down Rain

First, listen to the old men, watch  
their dry lips flap. Throw sheep

bones in the river, ribs and unlinked  
wings of spine. See the water wet them.

It's possible. Shoulder the sun  
and walk the fence line west. Wipe

an oily head of sweat on your t-shirt.  
Now come in for lunch—tomato

sandwich, ice water, the easy chair  
in the cellar where you open all

your father's books, breathe their inky  
dust. Then dream him an old man,

dream him dead again, years later,  
when fathers should die. Chase your

sister with a broken mouse, tell your  
brother lies about the neighbor girl.

Though there's no water anymore,  
crack off the ram's skull, toss it

in the river too. See the gravel smooth  
as skin, and your mother's face—

like gravel. Look at her. Know God  
does not hate you, that nine years

of drought is child's play. Now come  
back to the old men, see them rise

from wooden chairs, hear their bones  
sift the dust of yesterday's rain.

# Killing the Murnion Dogs

*Everything dies, baby, that's a fact.  
But maybe everything that dies someday comes back.*

—Bruce Springsteen

## *A Dream of Home*

*Now it's dusk we haul boxes chairs  
portraits framed in gray wood  
people I have never known  
a dead man shakes his head at us these twenty years  
my mother kisses his grim mouth  
takes the keys and drives  
hell bent for the far highway  
I say the gate's closed but she drives  
faster wooden posts and wire and the truck's steel nose  
slams through and out onto blacktop it's dark  
maybe rain and before us  
the whole world the whole world*



## Jacketing

*Blood*, he thinks,  
    jerking the stillborn's hide  
from its lifeless body, *is mother*  
    *of us all*, and grabs  
the bleating orphan, jackets  
    this new skin across its back,  
then turns to the dead lamb  
    and with a jackknife opens  
its throat—the bright, natal blood  
    puddles in his palm—  
and he splashes it over the nose  
    of the skin-dressed surrogate,  
*and soil*, he thinks, scooping a handful  
    of shit and wiping it, too,  
down the throat and chest, *our father*.

Now he rises and gently lifts  
    the befouled, reborn imposter  
into the pen with the lambless ewe  
    and watches as they both sniff  
and lick, and when finally  
    she bumps the orphan  
to her teat, he turns and leaves the shed—  
    a low rim of light slips  
over the eastern hills, a skein of ice  
    still on the trough. *In ten days*,  
he tells himself, *I'll cut away*  
    *the false skin*, and he lifts his hands  
before him where they steam with blood  
    and shit. *Come September*,  
*I'll sell that lamb for slaughter*.

## Outside a Liquor Store in South Memphis

To make a meal  
of moths,

of mayflies—

black rag  
of bat

flaps in and out  
of a streetlight's  
incandescent stammer.

The dumb

moon roped  
and hung from eave  
after rusted eave

of the empty  
warehouses north of Raines.

And this neon

sermon  
of blue Camels, High Life,  
Thunderbird—

such bright  
appetites in the city's itching dark.

## Rain Ghazal

We drive south out of Memphis, dark shoulders of rain  
behind us. Now we turn west, towards the river, into rain.

The setting sun tumbles like a drunk through the trees.  
An old man fishing the bank lifts his face to sun-red rain.

I sit on the porch, sip whiskey from a jam jar, listen  
for tree frogs and cicadas, for the lick of wind through rain.

Church Street is flooded. Don't try to drive it—it'll knock  
your spark out. Road of dirty water, outrage of rain.

It comes down like rusty buckets, stumps, bricks. Each morning  
she lifts herself from the dark water of dreams, but still it rains.

Wind shakes pecans from the dark trees. Before dawn  
we wake and gather them in the fog, a gray wool of rain.

The soybeans drowned. The wheat rotted at the roots.  
But green stalks swell between the dikes—rice loves rain.

A man holds a sopping bag over his head. Near the bayou,  
a boy pulls off his shoes, his shirt, runs lazy eights of rain.

They wake in the dark, the heat of their sleep between them.  
She swings her hips over his with the clatter of rain.

The road's a sudden river, trees thunder with dripping,  
the sky no longer belongs to itself. All the world is rain.

## A Roadside Diner in Iowa

Maybe you came here to read  
the local news—obituary,  
obituary, barn raising—but became  
distracted by the boys playing Pac-Man  
in the back hall with that reckless,  
sixteen-year-old joy, and you  
were a small boat drifting back  
a muddy river of years. Or maybe  
you have driven thousands of miles,  
your father dead three states away,  
but all you can think about is how  
you'll never make love again  
to that girl you knew in high school,  
and you miss her small shoulders  
and the way she smelled of apples,  
so you order a slice of pie  
and with that first hot forkful  
you know, no matter what,  
you can keep driving. Maybe  
you come here every day,  
because here every day is the same  
and you love that above all things,  
as your days are most times hard  
and wrong and wrapping your cracked

hands around a cup of milky coffee  
is the best thing you know.

Maybe you are poor but Vera keeps  
the toast coming all afternoon.

Maybe you are not so poor.  
Maybe the world is like that

and there is nothing you can do.  
Maybe this is your life—

corned-beef sandwich, fries,  
one thin, bright slice of orange.