

W H A T  
I S  
W H O

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SECTION II

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## MEMORY IS A NUISANCE

## HERE LIE OUR DEAD, OR SOMETHING TO THAT EFFECT

Razor-toothed overbite pushed down into the dirt.  
The town renamed Mournful Celebration.  
Hello there.  
Thank you for the moment to admire creation, its undoing.  
The lanky grass mowed into brown oblivion.  
Hats off also to making it this long, living on despite.  
Then comes the surprise depletion of a home.  
Who will pick up the weekly bacon?  
Who will paint the goat shed each spring?  
Someone has offered homemade party mix.  
That will contain grandmother's sadness for an afternoon.  
Or perhaps we should say wilderness.  
Another stage-dive into Aunt Tina's bosom to kick start the moving on.  
Each handshake gripped ajar.  
I am sorry for how this happened.  
I am sorry for how I am about to behave.  
Worn out & overwhelmed with flowers.  
Shaven clean & crying into my paper cup.  
Sometimes the dead leave us presents.  
Chickens to chase.  
Cans, three barrels, to cash in.  
That memory of a gunshot over the trailer  
& still you can hear the pellets rain, the whooping other side of the fence.

## FORMS OF GRIEF

grief trap  
griefcase  
Kansas City Griefs  
regrief  
Commander-in-Grief  
coral grief  
ground grief  
unbegrifable

roast grief  
boxer griefs  
grief blower  
disbegrif  
Griever Sutherland  
jewelry grief  
gold grief  
legal grief

begrif in God  
degrief  
mogrief  
handkergrif  
grief lightning!  
griefdom  
Georgia O'Grief  
barrier grief

## HOW I WISH TO BE REMEMBERED

As silly as asking a fence post to draw you  
A picture of a snowflake. As not so different

From kind Uncle Al, who each & every day  
Brought my mother the paper after my father

He ran off with her sister Aunt Joy & the fake  
Leg. It was important for me to see his face

Through the cracked grimy windshield before heading  
To school again. As my town is, my face barely

Pokes over the corn, bones like stalks stuck in the mud  
Till Brice's dad arrives to churn them up, haul them

Away. As the poem Maggie wrote about mangos  
Nailed to the abandoned church, which is probably

A good place to tell you some details have been changed  
For my protection, & on a Sunday even.

As that feeling one gets like you just might be the  
Only one left, like maybe everyone has done

Ran off to Florida to paddleboard themselves  
To death. Honestly, you feel rather fine with it.

As grumpy as a crab in the creek. As if I  
Can even pretend to write this poem, what, us

In this situation & all. No. Please do not  
Leave. I mean that with charm. As the day withers &

The apple trees stay the same, but what about me.  
Ah. As not another what about me. As not

Another what about me. One more breath: my love  
Extends herself for another glass of wine, shrimp.

### **[I am the turnstile. That is different than letting]**

I am the turnstile. That is different than letting  
The wolf in the house. We have to stop  
Denying that the clouds are disappearing.

Flowers found on the silent search after something  
Vanished in the dark. You have to be  
A good captain if you want to get your boat.

One's ability to understand love, it is  
Like believing in your own toes, a form of  
Trouble-making. I want to ruin this painting

Of a clean cabin. Men absorb anger from each  
Other, even if it is done in  
A playful way. Even among familiar

Noise like a truck, I am free to panic. I can  
Take only these handfuls of darkness.  
Each of us deserves to be forgiven for

Not choosing to be a farmer, closer to some  
Clear energy in the middle of  
The universe, if only what I said were true.

## A MURDER OF PONDS

One pond undresses itself in front of the jury.  
Another pond announces its arrival outside my window  
& there goes my bejeezus.  
One pond has no clue what to do  
To impress these trees. Another pond is meth.  
More ponds in the distance coughing.  
I am with you—I have no clue what to do  
With these trees. No clue  
Where they came from.  
One pond swimming inside itself.  
Two ponds fussing at the birds about their hairdos.  
Three ponds still like a ship on a shelf.  
Four ponds split into thirds.  
Another pond, another pond, another pond.  
More ponds with their own institutional power.  
One pond serves another pond.  
I thought I found a cooperating witness  
But it was just a pond with a clear voice.  
This pond frozen but not over.  
This pond welcoming a child.  
That is till someone objects, & then  
Like a miraculous fruit thrown against a dull sky,  
The tree becomes the gavel.

## WHAT IS WHO

I am sitting here thinking about Kevin's birth bundle,  
How it was two particles  
  
Subjected to conjunction & eventually  
Dilution till two legs popped clean  
  
& became the vehicle for Kevin right here.  
We have him here.  
  
It sounds so simple, but the pressure was sly  
Passing like a comet after ten years  
  
Aching some for it, but  
Not enough to get down here  
  
& join into the wholesome wholeness, till  
Finally the pressure did sink into the particles  
  
& the particles did party  
& the bundle brought forth changed  
  
Multiple people at least,  
Though the splat sound Kevin made during his entrance was alarming  
  
To say only one adjective.  
Like a pile of noodles from a cannon.  
  
Like an anthill on the tongue.  
Like infant flowers & their overbearing mud.  
  
It was January  
& the fat blue dots of water froze  
  
& the garnish on the edge burped.  
Snow inched against Kevin's ankles.

Birds clawed further up.  
The tangles tangled & screeched

& pecked open whimpers.  
They call this growing up in history books.

I am thinking about Kevin & the two creeks  
Laid so close they were almost one

Though they were not one  
& in the spring, Kevin liked to spend his early morns

With one foot in each, which is where one day  
Kevin saw seven boys in a row picking poblano peppers.

One of them, an orphan, craned his neck  
As if to say *memory is a nuisance*

*Vibrating in the toilet of the mouth*  
& the peppers made music

With the breeze ringing their seeds.  
Inside himself Kevin celebrated

& then, of course, Kevin did eventually pluck  
His skinny ankles from the shallow water

& traveled on down the road  
Blowing his nose, for instance,

& pushing his skateboard in time, for example,  
Every third kick punctuated with the sound

The nose makes in mild temperatures at high speeds  
When attempting to expel from itself

Snot that for days clogged his breath & slowed his smell  
& just like that the snot is gone.

Kevin, too, was gone from this moment  
As he crossed B Street & was not nearly home.

I am thinking about how Kevin disappeared.  
A woman in a small black sweater

She swore she saw Kevin.  
She suspected there was a logic to his shadowy presence

But still she did not approve of Kevin,  
How Kevin scooted along as if

Unattached to his own ass  
& you could tell she was a mother

By how she carried those little packets of peanuts  
& lived in a trailer stuffed

With first aid kits & horse figurines.  
What a weird future awaited Kevin in the past.

A giant purple cloud infected the air.  
Elsewhere, witnesses claimed Kevin

Became an old lady with a shaved head  
& zero tolerance for lukewarm coffee.

Elsewhere, they said Kevin became one of her figurines  
Submerged in water & left in the freezer.

The black stallion drowned to its feet.  
The fallen head of a clown holding balloons.

The barefoot boy paused in a patch of neon grass.  
A lion & his lop-sided mane.

Elsewhere, someone claimed Kevin was forever bent over a river  
& elsewhere, Kevin was a puppy.

Leash vanished, owner vanished.  
Musty doghouse under the live oak vanished.

Elsewhere, someone called to tell me  
Kevin is now a minor league baseball player with a missing hat

Or a snake, or elsewhere  
Kevin was the third string on Willie Nelson's guitar.

Elsewhere, Kevin sat with a half-empty mouth  
The faint clink of teeth remaining.

But now, I must address the absence  
Which, of course, was caused by Kevin leaving

& the silence, which, of course, was caused by the absence  
& also, the unknown, which, of course, was caused by the distance

Which, of course, was caused by the murmurs in the trees  
Though, of course, for any of this to matter now

Kevin eventually broke the period of absence  
Which, of course, vanished the distance

Which, of course, reversed the leaving & the silence with a single word  
Which, of course, you assume is "sorry"

Which, of course, was not "sorry."  
It was "chainsaw"

Which, of course, took care of the murmurs in the trees  
& the fat horses inside me glowed when Kevin returned

Which, of course, we do not know why,  
But for me, had become the new carnation of feeling.

I slammed the sledgehammer  
Through every solid wall I could find

Making holes to let in the light & the sound  
To make a beautiful orchestral accompaniment

For Kevin's stories of absence because  
Even when someone's leaving grinds the guts

& tugs the heart's fiddle strings,  
The ears lean in for the fisherman's tales

& the nose pokes forward hoping to catch a whiff of some exotic food.  
But Kevin only got punched in the face

By a homeless man on that first day  
On his runaway from home cradling the lifetime bereavement award

He awarded to himself.  
He handed over his wallet as the man insisted

& even threw in the keys to his pontoon.  
He felt less like a glob lodged in the lung of the world then.

He hid in an alley till the man left  
& then he waxed his skateboard so intensely

Kevin could no longer see himself in it.  
He saw right through it.

## PURE FINEST QUALITY HISTORY

It is digestible, Bernadette.  
We never did like sleep, one o'clock in the morning, lying with heavy eyes.  
This country was alive.  
Italy held one hundred ninety-five thousand secrets.  
A submarine pulled up to cooking school.  
I am not the only one who noticed.  
Putin has given Sweden crack.  
Full flavor & light as a chamomile petal.  
Not long ago there were adults everywhere.  
More than ever this is indigestible.  
One very old lady lacked faith in Tokyo.  
You are afraid to let a shapeless temporary horn have its say.  
*My mother is here & dear & so nervous*, she said.  
Surprised & so old!  
Ten billion dollars in ten years.  
The sidewalks of New York tingled with Canadian faces.  
Above the street, the wind.  
Sincerely, I ate pork on a Tuesday.  
A nickel once meant average butter.  
All fifty states were reviewed by only single white men in 1999.  
The session was catered—some bologna & very simple syrups.  
Roosevelt barged into Moscow with a lighter.  
To think a story can make such a difference.  
Heart-warmed on the battlefield.  
Regardless, tomorrow.

## SLOW LEVITATION

*"Memory's fog is rising." – Emily Dickinson*

Hello, ant in the glove box.  
Hello, bodily bow.  
Hello, charred first letter.  
Hello, dangled pearls.  
Hello, extraordinary gospels.  
Hello, first time circuits.  
Hello, gold frankincense & myrrh.  
Hello, hollow retro fashion.  
Hello, imagined seas.  
Hello, jello of consciousness.  
Hello, kitchen sink.  
Hello, little chart.  
Hello, mathematical casserole.  
Hello, neurological dust.  
Hello, opening in a fence.  
Hello, physical residue.  
Hello, quotation marks in autumn.  
Hello, relatively large head.  
Hello, seriously impossible artificial system.  
Hello, the patter in this two-dimensional diorama.  
Hello, ultra-thin handkerchiefs.  
Hello, various authors.  
Hello, waves of sound of echo.  
Hello, x-rayed light.  
Hello, you're a little out of focus.  
Hello, zamboni style.  
Hello, zoo for leaves trees & legumes.  
Hello, yellowed piece of paper.  
Hello, Xanax indirectly.  
Hello, walls.

Hello, violent herbivore.  
Hello, under the influence.  
Hello, twenty-seven-year-old receipt for socks.  
Hello, spinal silhouette.  
Hello, rare materials.  
Hello, quarantined delivery person.  
Hello, pupil experience.  
Hello, original bladder.  
Hello, no perceptible effect on wait.  
Hello, Muncie Indiana 2008 without a helmet.  
Hello, lengthy acoustic guitar solo.  
Hello, kaleidoscopic photography.  
Hello, jar of alchemy.  
Hello, image on a stamp.  
Hello, holographic monkeys.  
Hello, graduate student discipline.  
Hello, five hours before.  
Hello, explanation of orgasmic delight.  
Hello, drum of brain.  
Hello, combined colors.  
Hello, beeping sound made when in reverse.  
Hello, abstract coherence.  
Hello, automatic hope dispenser.  
Hello, better insight into the dead.

Hello, cognitive layer of cream.  
Hello, directions to Thomasville, NC.  
Hello, eight minutes & a piece of paper.  
Hello, formal fear consideration.  
Hello, ghost image.  
Hello, hillbilly distribution.  
Hello, imagined electrode experiment.  
Hello, jail without explanation.  
Hello, keepsakes covered in mud.  
Hello, laser beam.  
Hello, mushroom impulses.  
Hello, no not today.  
Hello, oxygen helmet.  
Hello, plasmatic waste.  
Hello, questionnaire.  
Hello, resistance to foxes.  
Hello, serious cells.  
Hello, tissue at the closest extent of reach.  
Hello, unlikely to exist.  
Hello, very distracting headache.  
Hello, weather-beaten concrete.  
Hello, xylophone gently.  
Hello, yelling threshold.  
Hello, zero prizes for point-of-view.

## EXPLOSIVE BREAD

One dancing goat, two laughing clouds.  
I was a baby pumpkin, rose  
From the potion. I have the feeling I am  
Being tasted. It smells thick in here  
Like joyful dogs, a big rush of pigs.  
I was happy once & suddenly  
I was moaning & car sick.  
I remember when I thought  
The sun was a floating piece of egg yolk, a fire  
In the village. I remember the tractor  
Sounded like a dying ghost.  
It was then I knew I had to do something.  
So I peaked. So I unhooked myself & the deer  
Nearly trampled me. So my mouth fell apart like a jar  
Of sticky jelly, confessing my long desires.  
To cure people. To sleep  
On a comfortable bed of straw. I have the feeling  
I am being puked. A little old broken  
Pocket watch keeps me company.  
The unicorn & the macaroon above.  
I am meditating like an eraser  
To make the crust not appear capable of pie.

## WHAT IS OCEAN

I am trying to remember the first time  
I felt the ocean, but can only recall my cousin  
Matt's first time seeing the ocean. It was dark, his  
Family had just arrived from Indiana, we had beat them  
There in our parallel mini-van, thanks to my dad  
& his good driving, he is a semi-truck  
Driver, & thanks to my bladder, how precise  
& hollow it can remain. Matt was  
Wearing a shirt with a collar & awful  
Loafers, as he always remained prepared to go  
To church or his Nana's house. Of my first time  
All I remember is I did not like how  
Light fiddled with the waves, but that glimpse  
Only stays for a moment, then it is back  
To Matt, how later he liked the stingray & how  
The stingray squealed a single solar system of bubbles  
After I rubbed its back, the only of my party  
To muster the guts. Then, like now, I can  
Be oblivious, or I can be courageous, my body covered  
In jellyfish stings & the scars they leave, but  
Not for too long. Like kelp, Matt & I were  
Mid-cook, still figuring out how to be these  
Creatures we found ourselves inside, not often  
Of tender feelings, except in that sound of sand  
Being licked by another wave, or a cousin crying  
When he left his hermit crab sanctuary on the porch  
All night & day, only to return to what is now  
Shriveled. Doubt, the strongest gift ever given  
To a soul skim-boarding in a body at the start of the tide.  
Like a footprint on the beach, Matt & I do not often  
Say goodbye. We do in fact live our crummy lives apart.

## BEEF JERKY ENERGY DRINK

I cannot remember the name of that artist in Brooklyn.  
I bought both with my final ten bucks.  
I was hurt.  
I was waiting on someone to turn me into a farmer.  
I squeezed the last drop from a melon with my good hand.  
I had no one left to shave my back.  
I am made of my eeks & my aches & the trembling.  
I saw an old man appear with a maroon handkerchief.  
I stood silent as he waved it across my face.  
I made sure nothing happened.  
I was granted no perfect nose.  
I did not become an old plow or worse speller.  
I still had this backside of fur.  
I did barrel into the desert to hunt for arrowheads.  
I did come back with a tentacle belonging to a giant worm.  
I compared it to Tremors, starring Kevin Bacon.  
I did wake up with bed bugs the size of Hershey Kisses.  
I did begin to blabber & have not stopped since.  
Hello, my name is Broken Mud.  
Hello, my name is Trimmed Trees.  
Hello, my name is UHaul Full of Pinatas.  
Hello, my name is Goliath After He Fell Hard.  
I think of myself as normal.  
I am often tired.  
I eat about a half dozen eggs a week.  
I ask questions only an idiot would answer.  
I ride my bicycle only when the weather is perfect.  
I see potatoes growing out of the ground everywhere I go.  
I take that as a sign things will be great.  
I came into this life hopeful to be productive.  
I ended up covered in chicken pox.  
I loathe the beach.  
I love the cold.  
I am unable to be left alone or green.

## ORIGINAL CONFIGURATION

It had to be when I unclenched my belt, the leather squeak &  
Smell, the way my pants felt  
Belonging to another person, someone gifted with bonus girth.

I did not intend for any of this  
Is another way I knew I was real. The sky shitting itself  
But yet the children ran wild, speaking in lines of poetry, & scratching open

The tiny oranges named Cuties.  
What if it is the same day? The real & the dream—  
A lacquered fog pressing right up against my broken thumbs

& extra pair of antlers. The most beautiful keeps rubbing.  
My thighs feel like condominiums, the songs sound  
Like the ones the counselors hummed during my past

Life as a zip line. Now, I am most static, never know when  
I might enter the forest  
When before there was always an appointment at four o'clock.

It was Little Donald.  
Every day, the bus spit him out in his red pajamas.  
Little Donald hated the clothes of this world.

He would sneak into my boss's office & steal her lucky jar of buttons.  
Why did she have a jar of buttons?  
Why wouldn't she?

Why do you have a jar of buttons  
Is a question Little Donald's mother asked each five o'clock  
Before unveiling the jar from her fat yellow purse.

The boss had been crying  
Under the aspen I am told. No memory.  
I do remember the taste of a fork in my mouth during those years

As a young foster child in Wyoming. Mrs. Felton could not stand  
My tears & shut me up with a glass of milk & a single slice of blueberry pie.  
Perfect!

Held up to the light, it is true, these little globules I found in the mulch  
Tell me everything I would manage to learn in this life  
Or the next, or the first day after

I would learn my next assignment: I was to be a field  
Of dairy cows sharing a single scared brain.  
& no, I cannot keep these pants I am wearing now.

