

Distortion

Mount Eerie

But I don't believe in ghosts or anything, I know that you are gone and that
I'm carrying some version of you around
Some untrustworthy old description in my memories
And that must be your ghost taking form, created every moment by me dreaming
you so
And is it my job now to hold whatever's left of you for all time? And to re-
enact you for our daughter's life?

I do remember when I was a kid and realized that life ends and is just over;
that a point comes where we no longer get to say or do anything
And then what? I guess just forgotten
And I said to my mom that I hoped to do something important with my life
Not be famous, but just remembered a little more, to echo beyond my actual e
nd
And my mom laughed at this kid trying to wriggle his way out of mortality, o
f the final inescapable feral scream
But I held that hope and grew up wondering what dying means Unsatisfied, amb
itious and squirming

The first dead body I ever saw in real life, was my great-grandfather's
Embalmed in a casket in Everett, in a room by the freeway
Where they talked me into reading a thing from the Bible
About walking through a valley in the shadow of death
But I didn't understand the words, I thought of actually walking through a v
alley in a shadow, with a backpack and a tent
But that dead body next to me spoke clear and metaphor-free

In December 2001 after having spent the summer and fall traveling mostly alo
ne around
The country that was spiraling into war and mania, little flags were everywh
ere
I was living on the periphery as a twenty-three-year-
old wrapped up in doing what I wanted
And it was music and painting on newsprint
And eating all the fruit from the tree like Tarzan, or Walt Whitman Voraciou
s, devouring life, singing my songs
Sleeping in yards without asking permission

But that December I was shaken by a pregnancy scale
From someone that I'd been with for only one night, many states away, who I
hadn't planned to keep knowing
A young and embarrassing over-confident animal male
And the terror of the idea of fatherhood at twenty-three destroyed my founda
tion, and left me freaked out and wandering around mourning the independence
and solitude that defined me then

Though my life is a galaxy of subtleties
My complex intentions and aspirations do not matter at all
In the face of the crushing flow of actual time
I saw my ancestors as sad and misunderstood in the same way
That my descendants will squint back through a fog trying to see
Some polluted version of all I meant to be in life
Their recollections pruned by the accidents of time, what got thrown away, a
nd what gets talked about at night
But she had her period eventually and I went back to being twenty-three

Eleven years later I was traveling alone again on an airplane from New Zeala

nd to Perth, Western Australia

Very alone, so far away from you and the home that we had made

I watched a movie on the plane about Jack Kerouac, a documentary going deeper than the usual congratulations

They interviewed his daughter, Jan Kerouac, and she tore through the history

She told about this deadbeat drinking, watching Three Stooges on TV

Not acknowledging his paternity, abandoning the child, taking cowardly refuge in his self-mythology

And when she spoke I heard your voice telling me about the adults who had abandoned you as a sweet kid and left you to grow precariously

And when she spoke I looked in her face and saw you looking back at me

On a tiny airplane seat screen at the bottom of the world

I saw a French-Canadian resemblance, and I heard suffering echoing

A lineage of bad parents and strong daughters withstanding

And she had black hair and freckles and pale skin just like you, and she told the hard truth and slayed the gods just like you

I saw the cracks in the façade of posterity

I missed you so I went home

The second dead body I ever saw was you, Geneviève

When I watched you turn from alive to dead, right here in our house

And I looked around the room and asked "Are you here? ", and you weren't, and you are not here, I sing to you though

I keep you breathing through my lungs in a constant, uncomfortable stream of memories trailing out until I am dead too

And then eventually the people who remember me will also die

Containing what it was like to stand in the same air with me, and breathe and wonder why

And then distortion

And then the silence of space

The Night Palace

The ocean blurring

But in my tears right now

Light gleams