

## G N O M O N

“The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.” — Wallace Stevens

I spent empty hours not writing. My whole life. Always fearing the slow thrall of memory, the figures cast by the narrow beam of stage light. I was afraid of many things. Mostly myself. The past. The arc and span of shadow marking the time. How suffering bleeds through the gauze of self, then clots. I saw the violence of my poverty scrawl into folded pages. Inkblots in a window. The gloss of a familiar story. My neighbor’s house burned to the ground and everyone stood on the naked asphalt and watched. I’d like to think it taught me how stillness graces the edge of a fire. How to fill the contours of absence with color and thanks. Still, I learned little from the bruises I gathered. Everything growing into the tragedy of its circumstance. Boys and nations and trees. In the backyard, the burnt grass crosshatched the lateness of the hour. A ginkgo swallowed the chain link fence, its leaves gilding the cracked concrete of the patio. I dreamed of bathing in heat. Flames washing over my skin.<sup>†</sup> No one asked if I was ok.<sup>‡‡</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> I wanted to kill myself. I never told anyone. Half-scared that needing help was worse than death. Not that it mattered. I survived. But I never forgot the reflection of the fire. How it lived in the eyes of those that watched. How, as the plumes breached the dark, its warmth soothed a deeper pain. That I dwelled there, in rooms and corridors blown from glass, speaks to the yield of memory.

<sup>‡</sup> I nearly caught my shadow, life irradiating into the usual clichés,<sup>††</sup> expectant hands sweeping over a face again and again just to keep the time. I was just a boy when the tang of butane and foil clung to my teeth. I couldn’t stop. I tasted retch. Bile. The rank gingko fruit littering the walk. Its soft flesh rotting.

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†† I wanted to be *candid*. Un güerito. The scrim of a shadowplay. To be other than myself, circling the narrative of a crater. Or not to be addled, heir to a watch with no hands. To divulge. To uncoil into light.

I whittled away the hours dreaming of applause. Shadowboxing this performance of ache and its ejecta. Convinced blankness would be my balm. That the clamor of a crowd would set me free. But to be

an addict is to be captivated by the glow of the shrapnel. To see a wight in the burnished steel and not run screaming. I tried outfoxing my shadow. Always too clever by half. Always emptyhanded. Let me be

frank: There was only ever a boy ashamed of himself, a boy who believed in love and wonder and joy. That boy died.<sup>‡</sup>

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<sup>‡</sup>DON'T FEEL SORRY FOR HIM. HE BOBBED LIKE A BAD EGG AFTER HE DROWNED. LISTEN. I KNOW THE CHASM<sup>‡‡</sup> OF SELF-PITY, HOW IT MUSHROOMS OVER EVERYTHING. I DID WHAT I HAD TO SO. A BROKEN CLOCK IS STILL RIGHT TWICE A DAY.

<sup>‡‡</sup> I used to confuse chasm with chiasmus, crossing my eyes and dotting my tees. I used to peer through a bombsight, see its circular logic everywhere...you can take the boy out the hood...  
Maybe I stared too long at the sun—the afterimage dripping like a bloodstain. Every rift a chiasmus, every life orbiting death

hood where palls of smoke smother the noonday sun haloing the little boy weeping for the

I wanted  
to write about  
simple things.  
Trees. Boy-  
hood. How  
dust motes  
tack across  
a sunbeam,

then disappear. But  
beauty feels inseparable  
from horror. Words seem  
useless. The first nuclear  
blast named after a poem.  
*O blessed glorious Trinity.*  
And what is beauty? They  
named the bomb *Little Boy*  
and it grew up alone. When  
the bomb exploded it rained  
spherules of molten glass.  
People, *real human beings*,  
with loves and hopes and  
dreams and desperations  
were burned into silhouettes  
on the sidewalk. What words  
will ever serve them? For  
centuries we told time with  
only the absence of light.  
That I learned to breathe and  
float is not beauty. At the  
center of the blast, six  
ginkgos survived.