

## CCS Writing Contest Submission

### Ancestry

The old men I know  
are obsessed with hands,  
callouses screeched  
around their knuckles like tinfoil  
challenging you to bite back

make like hyena, anteater, black bear  
body script filled for a fighting chance.  
Consumed, lavishing the violet haze  
of tainted spliffs and Prince,

their eyes — dead ringer  
assassins tying chains  
like boy scouts — trained  
against the ceiling fan,

pulsing alarm clock  
over nothing. But they clamor,  
cannibalistic drawls  
begging for reverence

as if old leather was worth wearing  
for its wisdom.

Remember the amber summers,  
remember gripping into skin  
like toilet paper, reaching for absolution  
between brown bottles and empty rollers,

foolhardy and violent, blissless bodies  
thrashing and caged.  
Burning oak trees,

stubborn and sutured forestry,  
crushing bark into your hollowed stumps,

and growing boys from the ashes.

He Dies

in the third degree  
fingers clutching the ends  
of a photo, tattooed  
with his sons birth.

of his own vices  
liver choking  
on reckless and afraid conversations.

by a hundred hands  
with respect for his honor  
and theres  
in reconcile  
with the family he hurt.

cheaply, empty.

because it is easy.  
because there is no labor in death.

and the long road is awkward and splintered,  
we are left to walk the miles he found emasculating  
until we are nothing but pyres  
eager to burn his shadow into the asphalt.

Over Years and Overnight

My dear sanity, I have misplaced you among the shatters and clanks  
of dutch oven lids against baby blue cast irons hanging from the sagging rotted pegboard in  
that old kitchen. You lie next to me, velvet whispers tied into streamers hanging above the  
dalmatian speckled tile that feels like gravel against our backs. Do you remember  
that night we walked in bare footed, half-lunged and wide awake, to the hush of a thousand

wings and darting eyes clinging to the rooftop. The memory of their shadows is still imprinted onto the ceiling light.

You are a wanderer, splint leg made walking cane, peddler of cautionary tales and makeshift moonlight seances. To be with you is unstable, you shake like the river below the pipe bridge I was once told me not to jump on. *This place means something to some people* I once longed to meet *some people*, not over breaking bridges, but to beg to anything besides pews waiting to be knelt on, to be anything but a waiting body desperately searching for something to make space for.

Yet, I have claimed this land without you. I have forced my refuge through clenched teeth and shredded skin, lips bursting like moths in early June. You are not the only thing dying in the first heat of summer. There is no need to search between the reams of paper on my father's desk, nor the bottom of the oil lamps he left behind, I've made char of them and told the ashes to leave forgotten.

So now my dear sanity, sleep peacefully, without need for the hum of car engines to lull you past the night terrors, without fear of calloused hands and knuckled grips, without a need to know the difference. Ride down the sidewalk, weaving your baby blue schwinn underneath driveways and in between fence posts. Don't find yourself crying into paint cans, metal splinters in your knees, ride on instead, keep your hands where you can hold them. Yellow eye, watch me, burn these irises between your retinas and dream of my body wrapped in satin when you lay down to sleep.

Forever,

Yours

Two Step

Let's paint the world in sepia tonight, dug up from the dirt of bare knuckle boxing matches. Pull your fists from the mud red sand and let them drag along the pavement.

Color these sidewalks in chalk lined afterburn leaving scorch marks where the telephone poles once shone like night lights to dye the foggy afternoons tangerine. Scrape your brethren from their carpet fibers, gather them in dust pans and watch them fly like grappling pirate hooks

latching onto the next morning breeze. I breathe with them,

the two stepping March men, hands tangled like undergrowth.

We bloodlet the daisies to paint the sky, bring with us  
the changing of seasons, cycle of rebirth, the felling of tyrants.

Without penchant for the day cycle, rise and grow out of autumn leaves  
reflected in rain puddles burning forests in the wake of summer. Feel the  
heat against your back as you watch it's shadow fall in front of you.

Forget me not

Sketched from vistages  
of hangnails  
and dead lips,  
skin tag  
road marks  
mingling with  
yellow bruises  
and kp  
scars,

overturned joints  
and wrapped ligaments  
find their way,  
like anxiety,  
trapped between  
the gasps  
in your throat.

Nerves,  
squelched  
pinched  
crimson  
into violet  
into gold,  
squeezing between  
jagged

veneers,  
imprints  
printing reminders  
along the creases  
of your hips,

between the folds  
you've forgotten,  
taut skin  
and wrinkles,  
pushing  
and pulling  
in familiar  
rhythm.

A distasteful memory,  
the gnawing,  
grind of  
perspiration,  
trippant  
desperation,  
inebriated on  
nightshades  
and melted wax,

heavy handed  
breathes

dripping  
as they  
find their way to the carpet,

leaving  
dirty,  
but  
unscarred.