

Origins

I'm from touch football in parking lots and street-corner Romeos
I'm from half-brothers and three-quarter nelsons
I'm from watered-down blue blood and finger-painting on subway walls
I'm from tongue kisses in stairwells and tequila sunsets in the closet
I'm from stealing the coins out of other people's wishing wells
I'm from jordache jeans and pick-up games in the twilight
I'm from Italian girls wearing murmurs I oh so badly wanted to speak
I'm from sidestepped obligations and nomadic fingertips
I'm from listerine in alleyways and whiskers in the vaseline
I'm from unreliable narrators and abandoned buildings
I'm from *don't cross 24th Street because of the Irish* and *don't cross South Street
because of the blacks*
I'm from the merry-go-round where white guys in cars slow down after midnight
to take a visual bite out of my twelve-year-old ass
I'm from *fuck you* when my friends are around, and *please stop looking at me,
please stop looking at me, please stop looking at me*, when I'm alone
I'm from sucker punches and a mouthful of blood spit in my face
I'm from a nightgown breathing at the bottom of a staircase
I'm from *I wished you died in that hospital*
I'm from exit plans that involve shotguns
I'm from *you gonna front like the hard guy, you better back that shit up*

Summer of Stationary Road Trips

You and your pal are pinned around a ceramic plate
that holds a forty-dollar rock of crystal meth

shaped like a dirty snow-colored tooth
pried from the mouth of a beggar. Your brain is a swarm

of asteroids orbiting the small, chemical sun. It's late
August, midafternoon air thick and pungent,

like you're trapped inside the armpit of a construction worker.
You're in the bedroom of your friend's older sister,

the first living girl you ever saw naked: four years ago, peering
through the slats of the wooden shower outside her father's

beach house. You lean over, snort one of her limbs
into your head, where it shreds into confetti. A blue fan

flings a thimble of stickiness in your direction. You squeeze
your lids, try to visualize her under the shower:

a lavender bar of soap smearing a streak of bubbles
over her abdomen. You clench your jaw, wish

for a mental brake pedal. You go to the bathroom, fetch
your penis from your underpants. It feels so not-yours

in your hand, seems to squint at you, tries to inch its way
back into your pelvis. The yellow trickles out.

You return to the bed, where your friend licks his lips
like a perpetual envelope. A rusty pipe leaks in your throat.

In three days, you will start tenth grade, for the second time.
Put on your seatbelt—it will be a forty-hour night.

The Pool

Twelve years old, treading water in the deep end
when Maria Goretti swims up and snatches

my tennis ball, clutches it to her new chest,
dares me to wrestle it back. The world—the lifeguard

in his elevated metal bucket, the grown-ups
buried in their lounge chairs, the other kids shallow-end

frolicking—can only see our heads, the twelve inches
bobbing above water, not the other fifty-eight

writhing beneath the surface, our silk thighs brushing,
our bathing suits bursting with these new pieces

of organic technology invented inside us. The grown-ups,
nerve endings filed down to a bore, and the lifeguard

with his transistor brain don't know Maria and I
have grown gills, that we're breathing underwater, that life

is happening down here. In twenty years, we'll climb out,
grab towels, slide on wedding rings, and sink

into our respective lounge chairs. The grown-ups
will have moved to Florida, a state with so many old people

it looks like a coffin being lowered at an angle
into the earth. The pool will be cemented over, paved

into a parking lot, where once a year Maria and I will come
with our bathing suits bunched up in our pockets

and stare at the yellow lines and the nicked fenders and think
how certain tailpipes look like the rusty lips of snorkels.

Heavy Breather Zoo

Whatever happened to the heavy breather?
Technology—*69, caller ID, the internet—
has rendered his kink obsolete. Who
can he dial now? He is the 8-track
of deviants. He tried launching filthy messages
in the naughty housewife chat room,
but they just treated him like he was normal,
which was damn near a death blow.

Should we gather up the last few
still out there, breathing all heavy in the wild,
before they go extinct, place them
in a special zoo, in cages, complete
with rotary phones, unplugged
of course, and nondescript apartment
furniture—crumpled-up sandwich
wrappers—to re-create the “natural habitat”?

Perhaps a plaque that reads: *here
sits the heavy breather. He used to call
housewives in the afternoon, turn his breath
into a fog machine. He lived for that
first intake of air, the gasp that escaped
her mouth like a weather balloon
as his fog traveled through her.*