







## Foreword

This all began with a small idea. I'd always wanted to write a family saga. Books like "East of Eden" have long been influences, and having such a large/strange/twisted family history myself, it seemed like a topic I could put a lot into. The original plan was to have two interconnected records, each one covering a generation of people. But I kept writing. By the time I was sitting down to record "The Roots", I'd amassed over forty songs. I ditched a few along the way, but oftentimes two would pop up in their place. I must have struck a chord, because the songs just kept happening. So I kept going, and here we are now, eight years later, with four complete records instead of two, and a great deal of explaining to do.

This guidebook combines the lyrics and artwork created throughout course of these records, but also explains how all of the songs are interconnected. My goal was to show how one person's decisions can affect a lot of other lives. There are also musical motifs that recur throughout the series, usually mutating in some way as they continue down a particular family line, but I will leave those for you to find, if you're so inclined.

There were some surprises through these albums. I had no idea it would take so long, and become so enormous. I also did not expect to weave my own life into this family tree so literally. I knew that I'd pull from a lot of personal experiences, which I did from the beginning, but the final installment of the series became far more personal than I ever intended. I've always hidden myself in stories, I must admit. But sometimes life rears up in such a way that you can't ignore it. Or at least I couldn't.

If you're here and reading this, I would also like to thank you. I'm well aware that a project like this requires patience, and that people are willing to invest their time and energy is not lost on me.

Yours,

-Ben

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*The Roots*







## FAMILY PORTRAIT

so we start with my father as a boy, barely spoke a word of english  
fell in love from a distance; he watched her working from the back fence  
learned some words and some clever turns of phrase from his father's book of poets  
she wasn't taken in that instance, but grew impressed with his persistence

they met each other out by moonlight, made love in the nearby woods  
then their folks became suspicious. when her cycle broke it settled it  
they stole away without their goodbyes. got married in a foreign town  
made their way as best as they could, found jobs and settled down  
and then time moved on

I was born in a river of blood on sheets from the wedding day  
the room was dark and the stench was thick; my father couldn't stand the smell of it  
momma died in the night 'cause the nearest doctor couldn't stem the blood loss  
father cried out on the back porch. my sister held me at the neighbor's house

oh my, there was a storm then. it was a flood of a different kind  
father's eyes were often vacant, but his hands were rarely quiet  
sister learned to take her hits well - both from life, and the physical kind  
I was never one to lie down, despite who picked the fight  
so we designed our hells

father turned into a drinker - a dark bastard with a wooden heart  
sister learned to be a mother before she ever played another part  
and I became a little terror; i lashed out at whatever was around  
took some time before I settled and found a mind that was somewhat sound  
and as it always does, the time marched on

six years later father died in the very same bedroom  
many said it was the grief that did it. I'd have to say it's 'cause he hung himself  
to be honest, neither sister nor myself ever much regret his passing  
but I admit it was a nice thing to always know that we could feed ourselves

The beginning of the family tree. All the songs and stories in the series stem from this one. Narrated by William Northcote, it tells of his mother's death during his childbirth, his father's breakdown and eventual demise, and the motherly role that his older sister, Victoria, stepped into at a young age.

William, like his father, was hot-headed and known for making rash, emotional decisions. He was likable and charming, but unpredictable. This theme continues throughout his family line.

Victoria, far too intelligent and peculiar for a woman of her time, was met with suspicion by those around her. She was quiet, pensive and unflappable. Many thought of her as a witch, or someone not entirely of our world. They were correct. Her bloodline is full of fantastic and seemingly impossible traits.

*To follow William, see: Black Eyes [4]*

*To Follow Victoria's line, see: Severus and Stone [6], The Dead Waltz [9]*



2

## N A M E S

as the warmth of the sun leaves my back  
and these bruise colored skies turn to black  
none of these faces look the same  
and not-a-one knows my name

oh I am a long way from home

this road is now my only friend  
it welcomes me through straights and through bends  
but no matter how long I stay  
IT'LL NEVER KNOW MY NAME

oh, I am a long way from home  
YEAH, I AM A LONG WAY FROM HOME

## *a pound of flesh*

My feet plow on, from light to dawn. My empty belly and my  
bodyaches aren't hard to take next to the weight I carry in  
my chest. A pound of flesh could never tip the scale  
that I've made. I should have stayed, but I was never wise.

I HEAR YOUR VOICES IN THE WIND THAT CUTS THE NIGHT .  
AND I PRAY TO WHATEVER IS LISTENING THINGS WILL BE ALRIGHT.

*Oh, my boy, you're alive. Your heart's still beating.  
So don't you mind, don't you mind. We all drift sometimes.*

*I can still hear your feet as you ran from the house.  
And knowing you won't be back doesn't mean that I  
will stop waiting. You told me then, hold me down, or hold  
me up to the fire. but don't you dare hold me back...*

I SEE YOUR FACES IN THE CLOUDS THAT SCAR THE NIGHT  
AND I PRAY TO WHOEVER IS LISTENING THINGS WILL BE ALRIGHT

then today I wake up feeling easy,  
and find I'm on the more familiar roads  
I got a darkness wrapped inside me,  
but now it ain't so hard to let it go  
so keep a candle burning in the window,  
I'm almost home

3

2/3: Judah, William's oldest son, is on his way home after murdering the man who  
mocked his family and stepped on his pride. Judah swore publicly that he'd set the  
record straight. He didn't intend to kill the man, but his temper got the best of him.  
He's now on the run from the murdered man's family.

To Follow Judah, see: Ghost Towns [7]





no matter how long I stay

it'll never know my name



4: This song follows William, narrator of "Family Portrait", as an adult. Drunk and furious with his wife for disappearing in the night with the children, he storms around town in an attempt to find her and "set her straight." He's become a brooding, mean drunk, much like his father.

To follow William's line, see: A Pound of Flesh [2], Always Gold [5], All is Well (it's only blood) [35], All is Well (goodbye, goodbye) [36]

5: This is the story of Robert and Kyle, sons of William Northcote, whose children were taken from him in the song "Black Eyes". They lived with their sister, mother and uncle after leaving William. Robert was always one to stay home and take care of things, while Kyle was aggressive and reckless and often left, only coming home in times of need.

To Follow Robert's line, see: Mountains [11], Letters Home [18], Letters Home (Aftermath) [38]

To follow Kyle, see: Chains [14]

## BLACK EYES

when you last left me, my blood was in a jar  
AND YOU KEPT IT ON YOUR MANTLEPIECE  
I couldn't count on anyone to stand there behind me  
and keep the dogs from dragging me off with them  
while I slept, you crept in  
and pulled the rug right out from under me  
in the rain, you stole away  
and took the parts that kept me functioning  
NOW MY HEART WILL BE BLACKER THAN YOUR EYES WHEN I'M  
through with you  
and I said: "This life ain't no love song."  
while I marched on the walls  
and my knuckles dragged across the walls  
and the birds up there mock me, and the scenery's TURNED  
W C K E D  
and your name is trapped beneath my tongue  
all of the roads are one now, each choice is the same  
all the roads, they are one now, each choice is the same  
I won't show my hands now, I know this ain't a game  
all the roads, they are one now, each choice is ...  
take a step, take another step, take another step  
not a care for where they fall  
you burned me, yeah, you've burned me,  
yeah, you've burned me now one too many times  
my thoughts are the cold kind  
I got storm clouds that are brewing behind my eyes  
and my heart will be blacker than your eyes when I'm  
THROUGH WITH YOU

4

## ALWAYS GOLD

we were tightknit boys, brothers in more than name. you would kill for me  
and knew that I'd do the same. and it cut me sharp, hearing you'd gone away.  
but everything goes away. yeah, everything goes away. but I am gonna be  
here until I'm nothing but bones in the ground.  
and I was there when you grew restless, and left in the dead of the night. and I  
was there when, 3 months later, you were standing in my door all beaten and  
tired, and I stepped aside  
everything goes away. yeah, everything goes away. but I am gonna be here until  
I'm nothing but bones in the ground. so quiet down  
we were opposites at birth. I was steady as a hammer. no one worried because  
they knew just where I'd be. and they said you were the crooked kind, that you  
would never have no worth. but you were always gold to me. and back when  
we were kids, we swore we knew the future, and how out wits would take us  
halfway around the world. but I never left this town, and you never saw new  
york, and we ain't ever crossed the sea  
but I am fine with where I am now. this home is home and all that I need but  
for you this place is shame, but you can blame me when there's no one left to  
blame. I don't mind  
all my life I've never known where you've been. there were holes in  
you, the kind that I could not mend. and I hear you say, right when  
you left that day: "DOES EVERYTHING GO AWAY?" yeah, everything goes  
away. but I am gonna be here until forever.  
so just call when you're around

5







7: Judah's actions in "A Pound Of Flesh" caught up with him. The family of the man he killed was out for revenge, so in order to keep his loved ones safe, he lived much of his life on the run. He always misses where he came from, but knows he cannot return.

To follow Judah's line, see: Reminders [15]



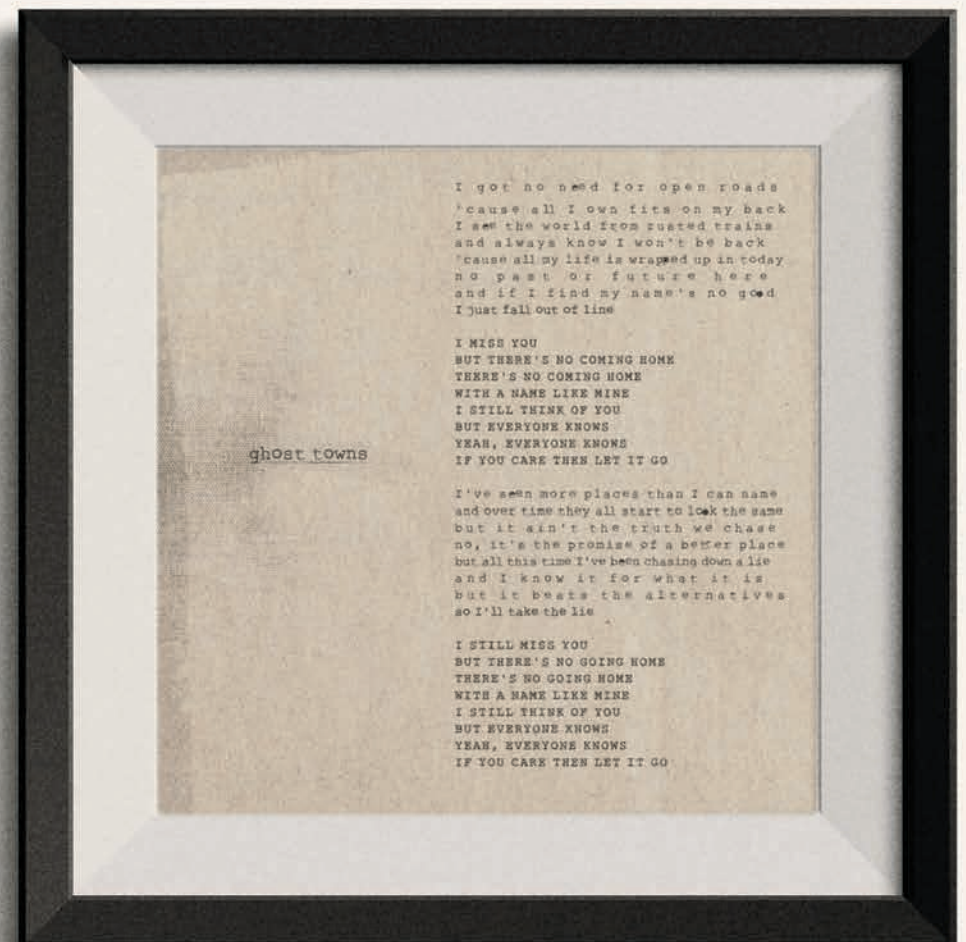
6

6: Victoria Northcote had three children out of wedlock. The father is unknown. Her youngest was a girl named Abigail, and she had two twin sons, Severus and Stone. This piece is narrated by Stone, and he tells the story of his brother's passing during the winter of their tenth year.

To follow Stone, see: Holy Branches [12], Kin [10], We're On Our Way [39]

To Follow Severus, see: Old Gemini [30]

For more detail see the short story: Severus and Stone



7



# Severus and Stone

Memories have a way of getting fuzzy over time. They soften around the edges, like looking at faraway houses through the fog. You know what they are, in a general sort of way, but you can't describe them in detail. But some memories stay sharp, no matter the fog of time. Or that's how it is for me. Shouldn't speak for anyone else, I guess.

I remember my last night with Severus like it was yesterday.

Severus fell sick when we were both ten. Nothing new there. He'd always been sicklier than me. Even as a baby. Momma used to joke that I'd taken all the health in the womb and Severus had taken all the brains. We both bridled at that, and she'd laugh. Momma was like that. She had a queer sense of humor, and not much got past her, but she'd let you know it with a wink instead of a bark. Everyone always thought her stern, even wicked. The village folk were scared of her. I knew the rumors – heard them enough from the other kids in town. Used to bust noses about it until 'Ma told me she'd start giving my food to Severus at mealtimes if I didn't stop. But she isn't mean at all. Never has been. She's just clever, more than most people feel a woman has a right to be, and that makes them uneasy.

Bah. Getting sidetracked. My point is Severus was always the sickly one, so I didn't think much of it when he got sick again. I figured he'd be back on his feet in a week or so, like always.

It was a mean winter that year. Meaner than any I can remember, though I may be biased 'cause of what happened. I remember the house would shake and rattle from the wind, as though giant hands had gotten hold of the roof. There were plenty of mornings where opening the front door was a struggle from all the snow that had piled up. A few times it was so bad I had to climb out the bedroom window and dig a path just so we could get it open. And through all of it, Severus was sick. I didn't worry too much until I noticed Mama's behavior changing. She normally seemed so confident, like she knew everything that was gonna happen. Even when I broke my arm and we had to set it ourselves, or when Severus got hard candy stuck in his windpipe and could barely breathe, she didn't fret. Her concern was only for our comfort, nothing deeper. But this time was different. I could see it in her eyes. She was genuinely worried, and it scared me.

Five nights into his fevers, I stayed up with Severus while Momma ran to collect the doctor. I gave him water when he was thirsty, kept the rags on his forehead cool and maintained the fire. It was quiet in the house. Too quiet for me. I made some jokes, and Severus would smile at them, but in a polite sort of way. I don't think he really heard them. When Momma finally arrived with Mr. Winthrop, the doctor, it was late. Mr. Winthrop was always pretty nice to us. He wasn't afraid of momma the way other folks were. He was too smart to get wrapped up in rumors and superstition. Only he and Tom, the neighbor, treated her right.

Momma made me leave while the doctor checked on Severus. I protested, but she wouldn't hear it. So I pressed my ear up against the door. Hard as I strained, I couldn't pick out most of what they were saying, but what I heard didn't sound good. When Mr. Winthrop left and I went back in, momma was staring out the window. Just standing there, stock still, barely breathing. The firelight danced along her dress, playing tricks on my eye. I stood in the door a long time before she turned around. She smiled at me, and it was the saddest smile I've ever seen. Looking back, I think she knew what was coming. Momma always knew.

Over the next three nights, I stayed with Severus. The first night he was lost in fevers. He'd just fade in and out, and we didn't interact much beyond me giving him water, or trying to make him eat, which he didn't. I was afraid. I started crying a little at one point. I was grateful that Severus was asleep. I didn't want him to see it. I was supposed to be the tough one.

The second night was better. Severus was awake a lot more, and even talked some. He asked what had been going on while he slept, and I told him. I made up some stories to make it seem like we hadn't been just sitting around worrying about him. I think he knew they were bulls, but he played along. He even joked a little. His voice was real weak, and his hands were shaky, but he seemed better than he had in a while.

On the third night, it was snowing outside. It'd been snowing all day, hard, like the weather had something to prove. It howled and beat its chest, and I remember being mad at it. Severus was real bad at first. I could hear him working to breathe and his eyes didn't focus well. When I'd cool his forehead, he just looked through me like I wasn't even there. Gave me the shivers. I was glad when he finally fell asleep. He looked at peace all of the sudden, and his chest didn't sound like it was at war anymore.



For a long time I just sat there, watching the candles flicker. Momma wasn't with us. All the nights of her sitting up in her chair and staring out the window had caught up to her and she finally went to her room and slept. While I was lost in thought, feet propped up on the edge of the bed, Severus sat up. It was real sudden, like something had tugged on his night shirt and yanked him upright. "Sev?" I said, but he didn't look at me. He had his head cocked funny, like he was listening to something outside, something in the wind. I asked him what was wrong, but he just pulled his covers off.

Then the damndest thing happened.

As he climbed out of bed and went to stand, his feet didn't touch the ground. He just hovered there, a good twelve inches from the floor. I was stunned. Struck dumb, couldn't get a word out. My heart was beating fast, like it was trying to break through my ribs. And then he started to move. No motion from his body – he just floated forward as though pulled by some invisible rope.

He moved past me like that, still listening to the thing I couldn't hear. He had an intent look on his face as he opened the door and floated through the frame. Without questioning it, I got up to follow. I always protected him. Momma said it was our job to keep each other safe, and with me being two minutes older, twice so. We moved through the family room to the front door, his night clothes all orange and red in the firelight, our shadows dancing along the walls, his feet still a foot from the ground. He opened the front door with surprising ease and hovered outside. I started to follow, then ran back inside. It was vicious cold out, so I grabbed Momma's knit blanket off the chair near the fireplace. When I got back out the door, Severus was already halfway across the yard, moving toward the trees. A chill shot through me that had nothing to do with the cold.

Once I caught up to Severus, we moved at an even pace. The pines seemed taller and more grand than they did during the day. Then the snow stopped falling and the world was completely still. With the moonlight pushing through the branches up above, everything was the color of ghosts. And quiet. The loudest sound was my own breathing. I didn't say anything as we went. I knew better. The moment felt fragile. Like if I spoke, it'd all shatter and the consequences would be hefty. But I remember looking back and seeing only one set of footprints. Mine. That, of all things, confirmed to me that this wasn't just some trick.

We approached a clearing. I spent a lot of afternoons in these woods and knew them as well as anyone, but I'd never seen this place before. I don't know how I could have missed it. The clearing was maybe 30 feet across, perfectly round and completely undisturbed. In the center, tall and proud, stood a single tree. Its naked branches were spread wide like the bones of angel wings. I stayed at the edge of that clearing. It didn't feel right for me to enter. Some part of me knew I didn't belong. But Severus didn't slow. He hovered across that space and right on up to that tree. And as he got close, he lifted up into the branches and leaned his body against them. Like the fingers of some great hand, they folded around him. I was afraid suddenly. I thought the branches were hurting him, or worse, taking him away. I almost stepped into the clearing then.

Severus must have known what I was gonna do, because he looked up at me suddenly. His eyes were clear, sharp, blue as a robin's egg. None of the fever haze was in them, and he said, "Don't. And don't you fear for me, Stone. I am where I'm supposed to be."

I nodded. And then the world went white.

It felt like I just blinked a few times, but suddenly I was awake and everything looked different. I was back on the front lawn, wrapped in the knit blanket I'd snatched from the chair, just sitting in the snow. It was morning. I must have been sitting there for a while, because I was shivering and my skin was pale. When I stood, it was hard to walk. In part because my legs were numb, but more because I knew Severus was gone. Momma says it's because twins share a connection other folks don't. I guess that's true, because when I woke up that day, there was a hole in me. Some piece I'd always had was missing, and the space it left was the size of a canyon.

As I stumbled back into the house, I heard Momma crying in our bedroom. It took me a moment to realize what the sound was. I'd never heard her cry before. When I entered the room, she didn't turn. I saw that she'd combed Severus's hair. She doesn't remember doing it, but I do. It struck me as strange. "You okay, Momma?" I asked. She turned and hugged me, and we sat like that for a long time. We didn't talk. There wasn't any point.

As for what came after, I'll keep it short. Not a lot to say. The following day was bleak. We buried Severus in the backyard. It was hard work. The ground was half frozen and I had blisters on my hands before we were done. The neighbor, Tom, came and helped. He didn't say anything, just brought a shovel over and started digging. Always was a quiet man. We did a small service that evening as the sun was going down, just the three of us. It wasn't snowing anymore and the sky was prettier than it had a right to be. All orange and pink and purple. Tom was silent until after it was all done with. "I'm so sorry," he finally said to Momma, then he walked home. We went inside.

Momma went in her room and closed the door without eating. I sat near the dwindling fire and ate cold soup that'd been made for Severus. It tasted like ashes. I almost started crying again, but I was cut short by one hell of a surprise. Severus had only been in the ground about an hour when I heard him speak, somewhere in my head.

"Hello, Stone," he said. And the bastard was laughing.



8: Victoria Northcote's neighbor was Tom Carson. Tom grew up in the same town as Victoria. He had always loved her, but never made his feelings known. Instead, he watched over her and helped in what ways he could.

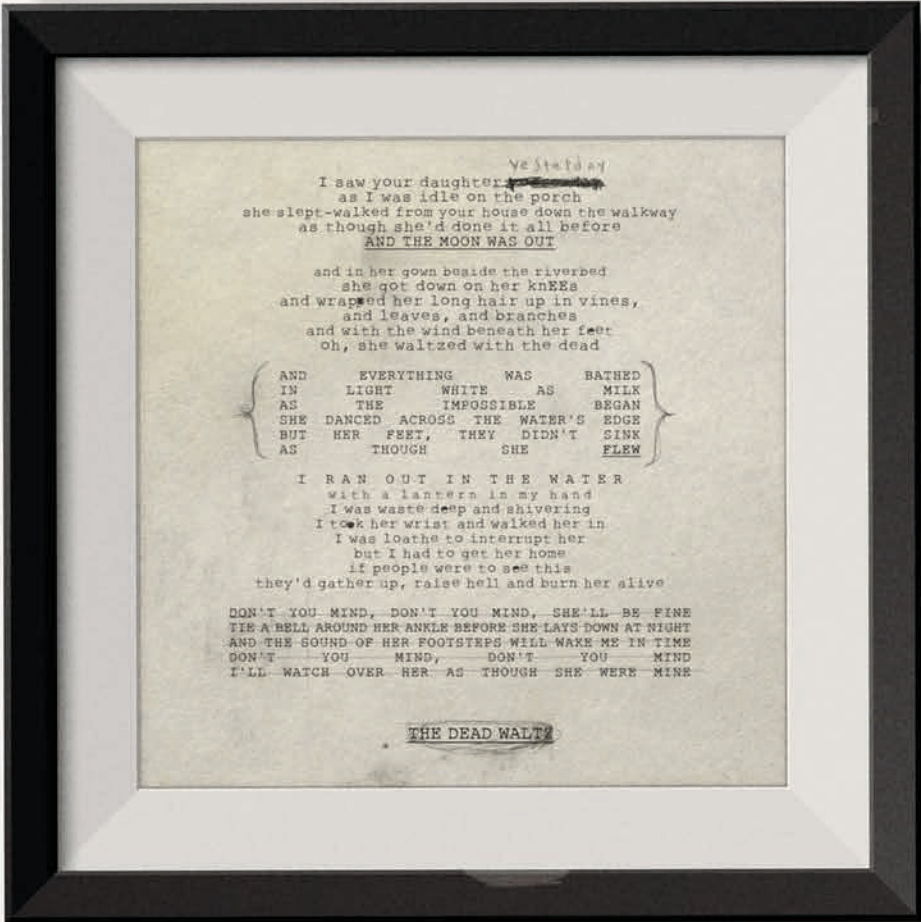
For more songs involving Tom, see: The Dead Waltz [9], The Mute [13], We All Go The Same [21]



8

9: Abigail, Victoria's daughter, inherited a strange quality: she walks on water when she sleepwalks. The song is narrated by Tom, the neighbor. He asks Victoria to tie a bell around her ankle when she goes to bed so he can keep an eye on her. If any of the villagers discovered she was "touched", they'd burn her as a witch.

To follow Abigail's line, see: Sisters [32], Southern Snow [20]



9





kin

grandma's singing in the bedroom  
it's a near forgotten lullaby she used to sing when I wasn't well

father's outside chopping firewood  
like he did when he'd been drinking, or when he and mom were at it again

GRANDPA'S ROCKING CHAIR IS ROCKING  
I can hear the wood complaining, and the idle taps as he empties his pipe

I do my best to just ignore them  
but the sound always finds me, despite them being DEAD AND GONE

I hear them all the time  
I hear them all the time  
I HEAR THEM ALL THE TIME  
I hear them all the time

I HEAR YOU ALL THE TIME. I FEEL YOU IN MY MIND. I  
CANNOT SLEEP BUT I'M TRYIN'. I HEAR YOU ALL THE

T I M E

10: Virgil Northcote, third son of William from "Family Portrait", receives a blood transfusion from his cousin Stone. Because of Stone's strange blood mixing with his, a dramatic change occurs: he begins hearing his dead relatives all around him. This trait continues throughout his family line.

To Follow Virgil's line, see: The Crooked Kind [17]

## Mountains

I was just a boy, and my father seemed a mountain then with a voice that could shake the seas. my mother's ghost hung across his shoulders and he said she was still watching over <sup>me</sup> ~~me~~. My bother was home, just returned on <sup>ARMY LEAVE</sup> ~~army leave~~ and told his stories with a distant stare. And as it snowed, the wind was howling through the trees, and I spent my night just listening by the fire.

A hand smoothed the creases from my <sup>brow</sup> ~~face~~, soft as a breath, itched like a feather. I dreamed of a lovely voice that night, ~~it was death~~ <sup>quiet as death</sup> outside my window. it sang a sad and lovely tune, clear as a bell, soft as a shiver it said "watch you all the time" ~~I watch you all the time~~ <sup>I watch you all the time</sup>

GOODBYE BAD THOUGHTS. I'M SAFE UNDER COVERS  
So goodbye bad thoughts. 'CAUSE I'M SAFE UNDER COVERS

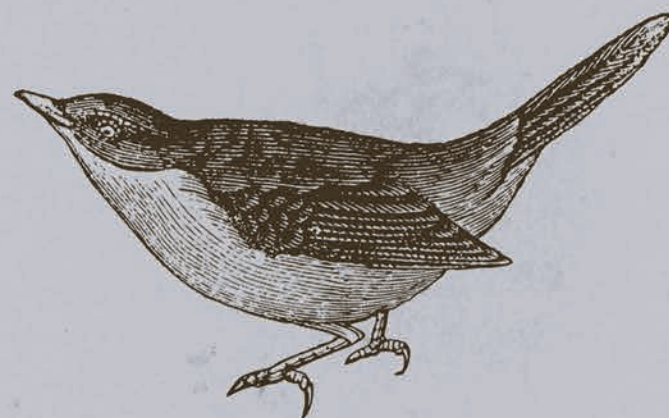
See you Again  
Now I can ~~see you again~~

11: Narrated by Timothy, the son of Robert from "Always Gold". Timothy's brother, Christopher, was home on military leave for Christmas, three years after their mother died of scarlet fever. It is the last time they all spend the holidays together before Christopher is shot in service.

To follow Timothy's line, see: Summer Skeletons [16]

To follow Christopher, see: Letters Home [18]

*The Branches*





When you were young, you'd bite yer tongue. CALM, always did what you were told. ~~NEVER~~ NEVER ran your mouth. lived life on tiptoes. only felt peace if by yourself, where mistakes don't count. THERE'S A HOLE IN YOUR CHEST from the time that you were born, one that DON'T GET FILLED. cause you've ALWAYS KNOWN you're nothing they want. BUT Everybody's Bones ARE JUST HOLY BRANCHES—cast from trees to cut PATTERNS IN the world. AND IN TIME we find some SHELTER, spill our leaves, and then sleep IN the EARTH. AND WHEN there, we'll belong, 'cause the EARTH don't give a DAMN IF you're LOST. NOW I LIVE ALONE. I WORK IN the BELLY of MACHINES, WRING MY soot-BLACK HANDS. AND I DON'T sleep much. The DAYS Don't Feel Different FROM the nights with NO GOALS IN MIND. THERE'S A HOLE IN MY CHEST FROM the TIME I WALKED AWAY, one I fill with SWEAT. 'cause NOW I KNOW I'm nothing they want. BUT Everybody's Bones ARE JUST ~~with~~ HOLY BRANCHES. RIDE THE BREEZE to cut PATTERNS IN the EARTH. AND IN TIME we find some SHELTER, spill our seeds AND THEN wait for our turns. but for now we're ADRIFT ~~on~~ ON the WINDS of DISCONTENT, trying to CARVE our PLACE. All in hopes we'll be SOMETHING THEY WANT. But I'M NOT holding my breath.

Trace YOUR FINGERS DOWN MY SPINE. MAKE your home Behind My eyes. Line My skull with Harmless lies. I'll BIDE My TIME until I'm something THEY WANT.

Holy branches



12

12. This song follows Stone, later in life, living alone and working to pass the time. When Stone saw his brother Severus die (which was only possible because of the link they shared as twins), Severus was interrupted in his passing on to the next world. Severus has since lived on in Stone's head as a second voice. Stone, thirty years later, still suffered from survivor's guilt. He felt that Severus should have carried on, that Severus was the smarter and more capable one. This obsession kept Severus trapped in their shared mind, unable to move on.

To follow Stone, see: Severus and Stone [6], We're On Our Way [39]

For more details, see the short story: Severus and Stone

## the Mute

Well, as a child I mostly spoke inside my head. I had conversations with the clouds, the dogs, the dead. AND they thought me Broken, that my Tongue was coated lead. But I just couldn't make my words make sense to them. If you only listen with your ears I can't get in.

AND I spent my evenings pulling stars out of the sky. AND I'd arrange them on the lawn where I would lie. AND IN the wind I'd taste the dreams of distant lives. AND I would bress myself up in them through the night. While my folks would sleep in seperate beds AND wonder why.

AND through them days I was a ghost atop my chair. My dad considered me a cross he had to bear. AND IN MY HEAD I'd sing apologies AND stare, as my mom would hang the clothes across the line, AND she would try to keep the empty from her eyes.

So then one afternoon I dressed myself alone. I packed my pillow case with everything I owned. AND IN MY HEAD I SAID "GOODBYE" then I WAS gone. AND I set out on the heels of the unknown. So my folks could have a new life of their own. AND THEN MAYBE I could find someone who can hear the only words THAT I know.

13

13. Tom, the Neighbor, never told Victoria how he felt. Instead, he married a woman that "made sense for him" and they had a son. The son could not speak, and Tom did not know how to handle him. He often felt his son's muteness was a punishment for loving another woman. Phillip, The Mute, eventually runs away.

For more songs involving Tom, see: The Moon is Down [8], The Dead Waltz [9], We All Go the Same [21]







~~WELL THIS STARTED SIMPLE~~  
Well this started simple, like it always does, with not  
much to lose. I thought I had control, that  
I could always walk away if things got  
bad. We were thick as thieves 'til I be-  
came the one who always went too far.  
and I couldn't hear you.

Now here I stand, a pick in callused hands. As  
the sun beats down on my back. But in the  
end I'm lost. And I'll drag you down. Yeah  
that's my cost.

But I'm glad you were my friend.  
though I may never see you again.

### CHAINS

14

14. Kyle, the reckless brother from "Always Gold",  
never really got his life together. He eventually  
moved south, too far to keep returning home to  
Robert with any regularity. It wasn't long before  
he fell in with the wrong people. After getting  
caught smuggling, he spent most of his life in and  
out of jail, working on the railroads. This is his  
letter home to his brother.

See also: Always Gold [5]

DEAR ~~WILLIAM~~

I WISH I HAD MORE NICE THINGS TO SAY. BUT I WAS RAISED  
NOT TO LIE. I'M ~~BE~~ EITHER HONEST OR I'M AN OPTIMIST, BUT  
NEVER BOTH AT THE SAME TIME.

AND EVERYONE KNOWS THE DEAL: YOU GOTTA TAKE WHAT YOU CAN.  
'CAUSE ANYTHING I DON'T STEAL JUST WINDS UP IN SOMEONE  
ELSE'S HANDS.

THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH GOOD A MAN CAN TAKE WHEN HE AIN'T  
SO GOOD HIMSELF. YOU REMIND ME OF WHAT I COULD HAVE BEEN.  
BUT THAT REMINDER AIN'T MUCH HELP.

SO IT'S BETTER IF YOU WERE ON YOUR WAY. IF YOU WERE SOMEWHERE  
FAR FROM ME, SO YOU CAN DREAM I TURNED OUT WELL. AND I CAN  
JUST GO TO SLEEP.

YOURS,

### REMINDERS

15

15. This follows Abel, bastard son of Judah from  
"Ghost Towns". He never met Judah and his mother  
was a prostitute. He was intelligent, but having no  
stability in his early life saddled him with trust  
issues. He pushed away anyone who started to  
mean something to him. This song is a letter to his  
lover, whom he'd accidentally fallen for.

To follow Abel, see: From the Mouth of an Injured  
Head [19], The Road to Nowhere [29], Nightclothes  
[42]



I'M GLAD YOU'RE DEAD







we were sunburned and sholess kids. It was the  
dead of July. We were skipping stones in the failing  
light. I smelled the fireplace although we were miles  
away. We were infinite. There was no time in those  
days. When all we knew wasn't stolen. When ~~there~~  
~~there~~ there was nothing real to lose. When  
our heads were still simple and we'd sleep beneath the  
moon. When you were something that would always be around.  
When regrets were nowhere to be found.  
lost out among the trees. our hands scraped the bark.  
You still had bloody knees from your spill in the  
dark. We were both laughing then, while carving  
bad words in the wood. And we had no need to  
speak.

→ Night. Down by the shore. We were  
down by the shore. and the skies opened up and all  
the stars fell into the lake. And the water was  
warm. Walked in over my head. and you pulled me  
out by the collar of my shirt.

Dirt in our ears. Sun in our eyes. Shirts hung in rags.  
head in the clouds. our ears had no teeth. hearts  
were still blind. you barely talked. and I didn't mind.

Summer  
Skeletons



i heard you telling lies. I heard you say you weren't born of our  
blood. I know we're the crooked kind. But you're crooked too boy.  
And it shows. ~~Some~~ Some get dealt simple hands. Some walk the  
common paths, all nice and worn. But all folks are damaged →  
goods. It ain't a talk of "if". Just one of "when" and "how". So  
collect your scars and wear 'em well. Your blood's as good an  
ink as any. So scratch your name into the clouds and pull  
'em all down.

### the crooked kind →

the thunder plays its drum. The air is heavy with the smell of  
storms. And I sit beside my brother and feel him shake as he  
laughs himself right back to sleep. And I'm laughing with him  
but I smell their blood. My fingers trace their faces in the wood.  
I hear their voices somewhere in my bones. I feel them sing  
along when I'm alone. When I'm not too frightened that is  
when I know, that I'm here with everyone. They're never  
truly gone I know it's everyone. I hear their songs. Oh, I'm  
lost with everyone. Shadows dance around the room. I know  
their names; I carry their blood too. They sing forgotten songs.  
I know the words; they've been with me since I was born.  
And as I grew, I danced with them too.

16. Narrated by Jim, the son of Timothy from "Mountains". A simple song where he reminisces about he and his best friend, Bailey, on a summer day down near the lake.

To follow Jim and Bailey, see: Baptisms [33], Rivers in the Dust [24]

17. Narrated by Frederick, the son of Virgil from "Kin". Like his father and little brother, David, he hears his dead relatives. He is embarrassed by his family and their strangeness. He struggles to appear normal and hides his relation to them. But as he grows, and as he sees how much better his little brother handles the same problems, he comes to terms with it.

To follow Frederick's line, see: Secrets (cellar door) [23], Kin [10]







Dear ~~Robert~~

So I'm Writing you this letter between rests. Because yesterday a bullet found my chest. And I don't have the energy to dress myself, and I can't walk without help. AND I can't remember why I joined this war. And I can't tell you what we're fighting for. I guess I wasn't smart enough to see the game, and that no one's keeping score.

AND now, you would not believe the things I miss. It's all the little things that fill that list. Like playing with the dogs and helping father chop the wood behind the fence. Now I'm not sure if I'll see another day. The doctor said it could go either way. But I just wanted you to know - no matter if I sink or fall, or blink out in this hospital, that I'm alright. Yeah, I've made peace with it all. Mistakes and all.

Your Son,

~~Robert~~

letters home

18. Robert's son, Chase (also mentioned as the older brother in "Mountains"), is writing home from his hospital bed. He was shot in the abdomen and doesn't know if he will pull through. The doctors don't seem optimistic. He makes peace with his fate over the course of writing his letter.

See also: Letters Home (aftermath) [38],

Mountains [11]



Hold Me Against the floor. Use Something to bind My HANDS. Cause I Don't Know where I have been. And I Don't Know where I have ~~been~~ Seen. But The Puzzle Is Carved Into Me. And I Know That I Miss You, But I Don't even Know Your Name. But When You're Near Me I feel okay. Yeah, When You're Me I'm Not Ashamed. And the holes in My head Aint as Plain. In My Sleep, I can hear a Voice, A Call, a Withering Echo, And it Sings! It Sings All Knowing Words. But ones I Can't Understand. Like Running Water Slipping through My fingers. WHILE I'M DOWN NEAR THE WINDOW, I FEEL YOUR HANDS AS THEY BIND MY HEAD. I'M WATCHING BIRDS THROUGH THE OPEN SHADES. YOU I HEAR YOU WONDER IF I'M OKAY. OR IF THE CRACKS ARE TOO DEEP IN MY BRAIN. IN MY DREAMS, I CAN HEAR A VOICE, A CALL, A WITHERING ECHO. AND IT SINGS! IT SINGS ALL KNOWING WORDS. BUT ONES I CAN'T UNDERSTAND. HERE IT GOES AGAIN. now there's something Missing. Something lost in My Head. Could you help Me fix it? Could you please Come stitch Me up? Cause I Don't Know How. Yeah, I Don't Know How. And the answers are Buried in Me. And I Know That I Miss you. But I Don't even Know Your Name.

from the Mouth of An Injured Head

### Southern Snow

It WAS the Year MY SON WAS BORN  
the SAME Year  
My sis' WALKED INTO the Woods  
AND WAS NEVER SEEN Again  
I still CALL Her NAME sometimes  
JUST IN CASE  
the SNOWS CAME AT NOON  
AND the SKIES WERE A BITTER BLUE  
SOME WERE calling IT A PUNISHMENT  
FROM GOD  
AND MY DAD SAID...  
"that's A STRANGE thing to call the  
Weather." AND WE LAUGHED together



19. Abel, from "Reminders", gets a head injury while working a construction job. His lover, who he was trying to keep away from him, visits him in the hospital daily. His amnesia, while frustrating, allows him a new start. His hang ups are erased, and he allows himself to fall in love with her.

To Follow Abel's line, see: Nightclothes [42], The Road to Nowhere [29]

20. Abigail, daughter of Victoria from "The Dead Waltz", had three children. Gabriel, Katelyn and Annabel. Annabel is the sister who walks into the woods and is never seen again, and Katelyn left home as a teenager to live with their cousins. Gabriel is the narrator, and he tells of the time that it snowed in the deep south and their neighbor's absurd reaction to it.

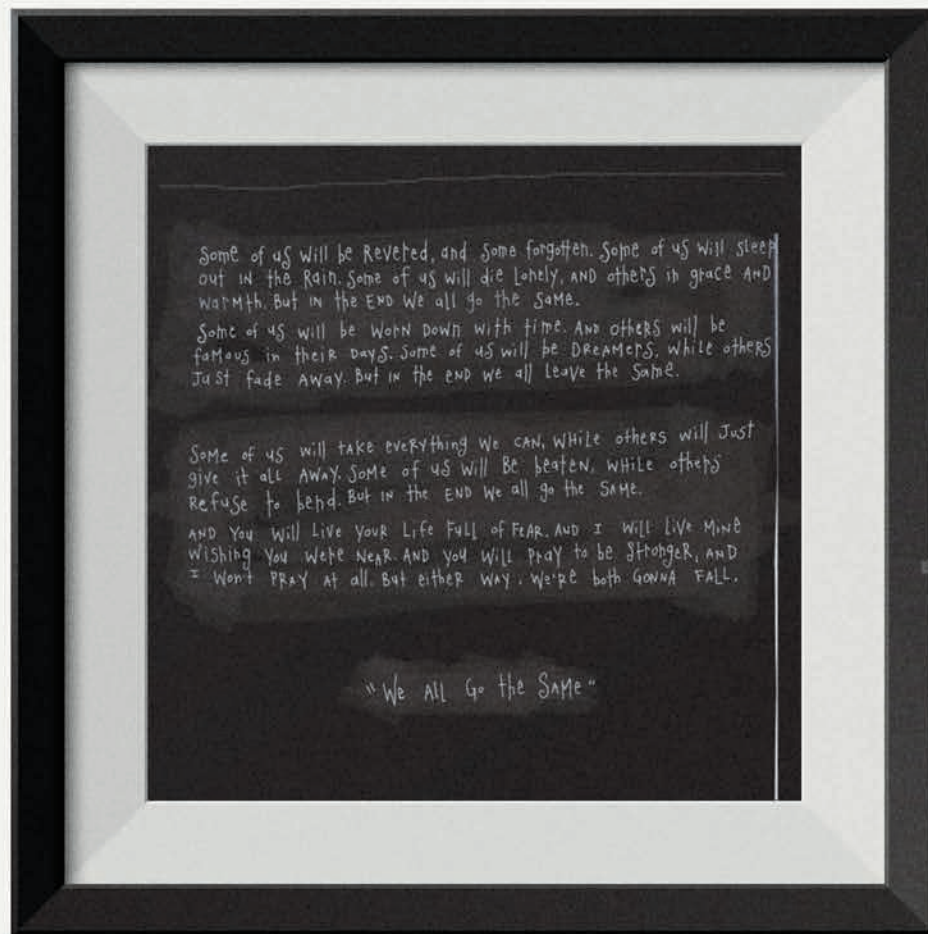
To follow Annabel, see: Midnight [26],  
The Dead Waltz [9]

To Follow Gabriel's line, see: Secrets (Cellar Door) [23]







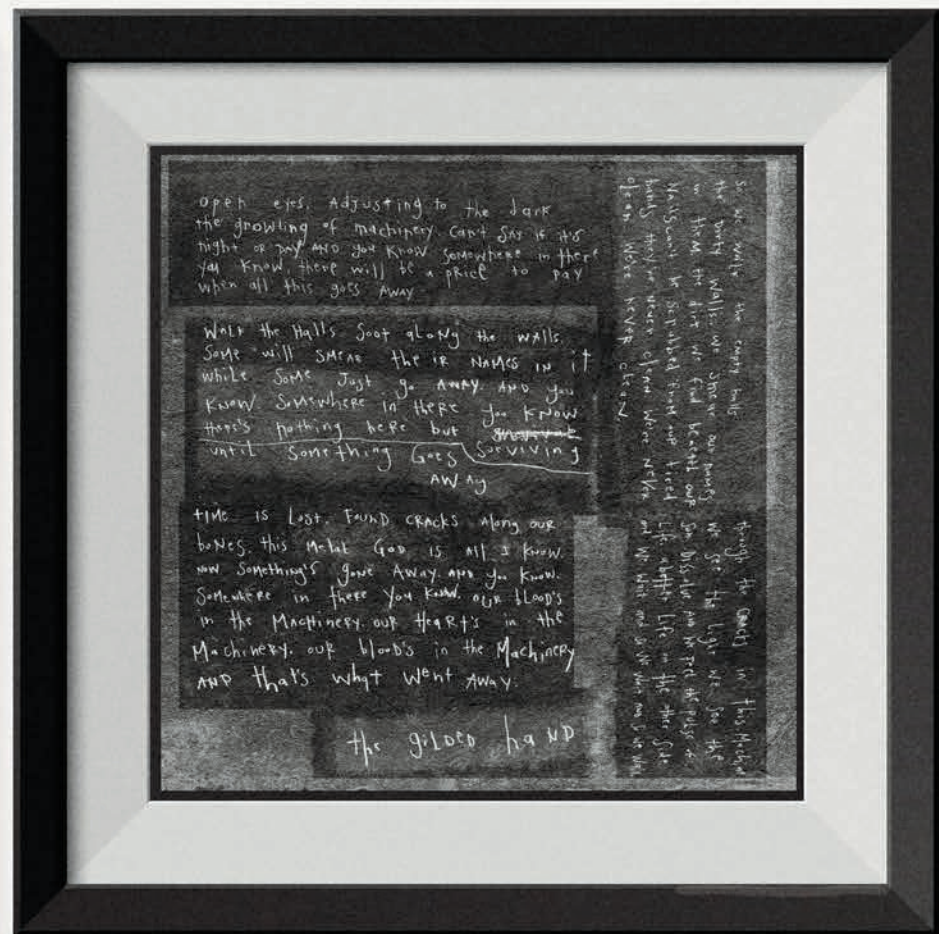


21. This is the final song of Tom, Victoria's neighbor. It's written after Victoria's passing, and after his wife left him. He misses his wife, finally realizing, too late, that he was never very good to her because he was obsessed with Victoria.

See also: The Moon is Down [8], The Dead Waltz [9], The Mute [13]

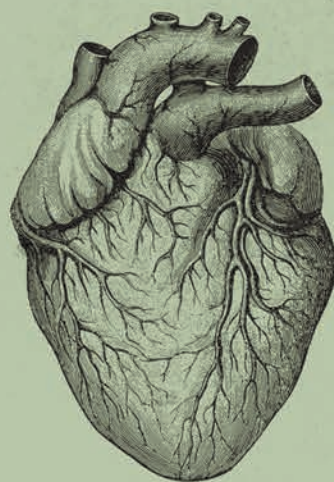
22. A scientist and sociopath by the name of Artemis Tomb is obsessed with the idea of alchemy. He finds evidence of the "strange blood" some of the Northcote's possess. He has a factory in a neighboring industrial town, which is largely a front to seek these people out and experiment on them. Since a lot of folks born "odd" are run-aways or have been abandoned by their families, he focuses on finding street kids, of which there are plenty. When he finds one that is "touched", he experiments on them. Many of those are never seen again. The "normal" ones are left to work in the factories.

To follow this line, see: The Road To Nowhere [29]





# *The Leaves*





## secrets (cellar door)

drawn into the frost on the glass was a map  
pointing to my secret hiding place  
it led you to the tree with the split in its trunk  
on the way into your family's yard  
and in that tree you saw I'd brought the dog back to life  
I watched you from the branches  
while you stared from the ground  
with a look I couldn't understand

so I said leave me alone  
if you're only words are ugly ones  
and you just smiled  
and said come and show me how it's done

we dug up your old bird  
and you held her to your chest  
as I breathed life back into her lungs  
she blinked and flapped her wings  
and sang a familiar song  
before she took to the air and cut a path into the woods

and then I cried  
'cause all my life I had known  
something was off  
but you just shrugged  
and said "It ain't just you"

slipping on the pavement while we ran from the ghost  
that you saw behind the cellar door  
and that's the way you showed me that I wasn't quite alone  
that you'd also touched the dead before

## RIVERS in the Dust

THE SWEET CUTS RIVERS IN THE DUST ON YER FACE  
WHILE THE WILDS BENCAIN COMPLAIN  
THE WIND STILL WHISTLES THROUGH THE HAZE  
AND THE SUN SHINES LIKE A RAZORBLADE  
AND THE BONES OF CROPS AND BANKNOTES PAVE THE WAY

AND YOU WOULD HOLD MY HANDS AND CLOSE YOUR EYES AND I  
BEARS ITS TEETH, YOU LEARN YOUR PLACE/AND THIS GOD DIDN'T MIND WHEN HE  
THE MOON FOR ALL IT PROVIDES/EYES ARE ON THE ROAD BEFORE FORSAKEN SUN COULD BE  
IT DISAPPEARS AGAIN

THE HIGHWAYS ARE LINED WITH GR AVES, LIKE THE FINGERNAILS OF GIANTS  
LIKE BLOOD PULSED THROUGH A VEIN WE RUSH THE WEST IN SILENCE  
AND I AM NOT THE ONE YOU WANTED HERE, BUT I WILL FILL MY  
HEAVEN'S TOUCH IS OFTEN OUT OF REACH FOR THOSE WHO WANT IT MOST POST

YOU WEAR A ROSE FROM YESTERDAY LIKE THE WORLD IS GREEN AND OVERGROWN  
WHILE I WEAR A HANDKERCHIEF AROUND MY MOUTH TO KEEP THE DUST AND ASHES OUT  
I DREAM A GLASS OF WATER WITH YOU DREAMING OF THE SEA  
AND I'D WATCH MY FEET AND YOU WOULD WATCH THE SKY  
AND WE WOULD WONDER WHY OUR EYES NO LONGER MEET  
IT WAS HARD TO CALL THE THING WE SAW A STORM, LIKE IT HAD CLIMBED OUT OF THE PAGES  
OF A NOVEL

AND THE SHEETS OF DUST HIT EVERYTHING LIKE WAVES AGAINST THE ROCKS  
IT WAS MORNING BUT I'D BE DAMNED IF I COULD TELL



23. Abigail's granddaughter, Bella (whose father narrates "Southern Snow"), winds up next door to Judah's grandson (the son of Frederick from "The Crooked Kind"). Their secrets are revealed over the course of the song - that they both interact with the dead.

See also: Southern Snow [20], The Crooked Kind [17]

24. Bailey, from the songs "Summer Skeletons" and "Baptisms", is helping Jim's wife move west. The dustbowl is in full swing, and Jim died of cancer the year before. Both Bailey and his dead friend's wife, Carmen, have lost their homes, so they are traveling to California together. She resents having Bailey with her at first, but over the course of their travels and hardships heading west, they fall in love.

See also: Summer Skeletons [16], Baptisms [33]



# Secrets (Cellar Door)

The first time I did it by accident.

The cat couldn't have been dead more than a couple hours. I don't know what got it, but it was something with teeth. My first thought was a dog, but that's just prejudice on my part. Could've been anything. I squatted next to it, curious and kinda sad. I reached out to poke her and my fingers instantly tingled, all electricity and swirling blood, but it wasn't unpleasant. They felt warm and fuzzy, like they'd been filled with soda pop left out in the sun. When I touched the cat, I felt the warmth move out of me and into the corpse. I was suddenly cold, my veins full of icesickles, but I was fascinated and didn't let go. Before my eyes the wounds closed up, stitched by an invisible hand, and I felt my heartbeat match with hers. I have no name for what I felt. Probably because it was a bunch of things all at once.

When I could no longer stand the ice cubes under my skin, I pulled my hand away. For a moment, nothing happened. I watched her and rubbed my arms and wondered if I had imagined it all. Then her eye moved and met mine, and she yawned and stood up.

Mom didn't let me keep her. She shook her head, making a face, and said it looked half dead. I was disappointed, but her comment made me smile to myself. I enjoyed secrets. They made me feel important.

I think the cat being freshly dead is the only reason it worked so easy. I quickly learned that the more rotten something was, the more it took out of you. I tried to bring back road kill a week after. Even giving it everything I had only brought the flattened racoon back long enough for him to whimper, claw the air and return to the other side. I thought I was gonna vomit, the sides of my eyes going dark and my mouth filling with saliva, but instead I fainted. I woke up a half hour later, still nauseous, head pounding, and realized what I'd done -- that I'd only called him back long enough to feel pain and fear one last time.

I didn't talk much for the rest of the week.

---

We moved to Georgia a year after my discovery. My folks said it was because my dad got a new job, but he had to search for work when we got there so I know that wasn't true. At first I was mad. I didn't have many friends in Virginia, and outside of the woods behind our house, I had no real attachment to anything there. I just resented my lack of input. I was hard-headed for a girl my age. Or so I'm told. But after a week my resentment was gone, replaced by my first good friend.

Kyle was the boy next door. He was a year younger, but you'd never know it. He was quick to smile, tall for his age and more or less unflappable. Very much his opposite, I was tense and small, watching everything like a suspicious little barn owl. He could talk to anyone, which I felt was its own kind of magic, and still do. We were curious types, but he had a patience about it. Not me. Once curiosity bit, my time-bomb started ticking. I would often declare things like, "Tomorrow, we have to go see what is beyond that creek." He'd just smile and say, "Sure."

In no time, we shared everything and spent every afternoon together.

Kyle's family was weird. His father and big sister were nice enough, but you always felt they were listening to something else when you were around. It wasn't terribly noticeable when talking one-on-one, but when both were in the room getting distracted at the same time, it was unsettling. I sometimes saw Kyle do it, but he was way more subtle. He never lost track that there were other people around him the way the rest his family did. They were kind people, though, generous and neighborly in all the ways you could ever ask for. Just odd.

But who am I to talk? My family is a secretive bunch. I can't count how many times my parents have cut conversations the moment I walked by. And they whisper even in their own bedroom sometimes. I know, because I've pressed my ear to their door. Sometimes I'd catch them watching me, like they were trying to dig around in my head, and I felt like they knew my secret. But if they figured it out, they never brought it up.

Anyway, Kyle and I did everything together. I was more tomboy than not and he wasn't too macho, so we met somewhere in the middle. We did all the usual things kids our age did: fight invisible monsters with sticks, hide in ditches and throw pinecone hand-grenades at invisible soldiers, listen to radio serials on his back porch. But all along I held on to my secret. I was too afraid of what Kyle might think. He was my first real friend and that was nothing to mess with. All that changed when Charlie died.



Charlie was the neighborhood mutt. He belonged to the lady down the street, but she didn't pay him much attention so he'd come sit with us when we were on my back porch. Sometimes we'd slip him food when are parents weren't around. He was old and somber looking, like he knew too much and didn't know what to do with it, but we liked him. He was a good dog.

I don't know what killed him. Might've just been old age. We found him near the creek, lying there like he was about to drink some water. Kyle cried. He didn't hide it either, the way most boys do. He just let the tears run while he sat and pet his cold, still back, then walked home without saying anything. I watched him go until I started to feel my fingers tingle.

Kyle's bedroom window faced mine. We didn't plan it. Just how it wound up. When it was cold out, we'd write messages to each other in the frost on the glass. We'd do it in a secret code he'd taught me, which made us feel clever. That morning I wrote the message "Meet me here!" and drew a little map to a spot I'd never shown him.

It led to my secret hiding spot, in the split trunk of an old oak down by the creek. I liked to believe the split was from a lightning strike. That's where I'd go when my thoughts were too loud, or to hide things I wanted no one in the world to know about. But seeing Kyle cry changed things and I was willing to give that up now. Along with my secret.

Hell's teeth, was I nervous! I got there before Kyle was awake and in the tree trunk I let my fingers do their trick. I almost went too far. I had to lay down for a bit, but I did not faint. Charlie let out a little howl when he came back, but then licked my hand and stayed put. I nodded and whispered, "Stay, boy." Then I climbed the tree with shaky limbs, sat in a branch and waited for Kyle.

My heart was in my mouth when he walked up. His hair was messy and he still looked sleepy, so he must have come right when he saw my message. He looked up at me when he arrived and said, "What happened?"

I couldn't talk, so I just pointed to the split trunk beneath me. Kyle peaked inside, then stepped back out, eyes wide. I could have cried but choked the tears back.

"If you got something ugly to say, say it," I said, angry as I could.

Kyle looked back at Charlie, then looked up at me again quizzically. Then he smiled real big and I knew everything was fine.

---

After that, Kyle was excited in a way I'd never seen him. He looked like he could hardly sit still. Ants in his pants, my mom would have said. I was still nervous. Secrets grow the longer you hold them and mine felt the size of a house. Big enough to crush me, for sure. He asked if I could do it again and let him watch. I said "no" right away, but he begged me, truly begged. An hour later I caved. He ran and grabbed a shovel and took me to a spot near the creek and started digging. I didn't know what he was on about, then I remembered Lady.

Lady was his old parakeet. He'd had her for as long as he could remember and she'd died the month before. I didn't say anything to him about it because I'm no good with those things, but I know he was upset. And now I could see why he was so excited. I wasn't sure if I could bring back something so far gone, but I didn't say it aloud. I was suddenly scared to disappoint him. There was relief in someone finally knowing my secret and I didn't want to muck it up. I also figured since a bird like that is very small it might not be too tough.

From the ground, covered in clumpy soil, came an old metal lunch box with tape around the edges. Using his pocket knife, he opening the tin and showed me. I was right. It was Lady. And she wasn't in such bad shape! I guess the sealed box had preserved her pretty well. The smell wasn't nice, but I figured I could do this.

"I'm gonna need to eat something first. I already brought Charlie back and I'm pretty lightheaded."

Kyle nodded, dancing from foot to foot, and said, "Be right back."

He ran for his house. Before I could get too nervous again he was already darting back, two slices of bread, three apples and a sausage in his hands. I ate all of it sitting cross-legged in the grass, using my elbows to fend off Charlie. I gave him half the sausage, though, 'cause he looked so hungry and I felt bad. And I imagine coming back from the dead might leave you starving.



Once the food was gone and I wasn't shaky, Kyle sat in the grass and held Lady up to his chest carefully. He watched me closer than he ever had before. I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing. I just let my fingers grow tingly and I touched his parakeet on the back of her head. For what felt like a lifetime but was probably two minutes, nothing happened. I grew anxious. I'd never done something this far gone before. The transfer from my fingers was slow, like pushing a dull pencil through heavy fabric. Kyle sat patiently the entire time and didn't interrupt me. He was smart that way. He knew when to talk and when to keep quiet.

I was starting to feel pretty ill when, quick as anything, I broke through and the energy shot out of me. Small as she was, the transfer happened in maybe two seconds. I was thankful for it. I'd have fainted if it had been much longer.

Lady started blinking, then her wiggled her wings. Kyle laughed and the biggest smile split his face. She started chirping, a song we both knew well. Kyle tried to get a grip on her, but she took off into the air and dashed through the trees before he could. And it didn't look like she was coming back.

I watched Kyle to see if he'd be upset, but he didn't look sad at all. He just waved and said "Bye, Lady!"

I frowned at him, not really understanding. He turned to me and said, "I didn't get to say goodbye last time. I just came home and she was dead. I didn't want to own her again. I just wanted to say goodbye."

He smiled again, and I did too.

Showing someone my secret was a huge relief. Sometimes we don't recognize the ball and chain we're lugging around until it's gone. It's only when you're free of the weight that you understand how heavy it was. My secret was like that. My parents even noted that I looked happier and not so withdrawn, and so did my teachers. And there is something about sharing a secret that opens the door for people to share theirs.

Kyle's secret was a cellar door.

The weekend after I brought Lady back to life, Kyle had me look through the living room window at his sister and father cleaning the kitchen. He asked if I ever noticed how they seemed like they were listening to something, both at the same time, and how his whole family would do it.

I said "Yeah, I noticed. I just didn't wanna say something and make you guys feel funny."

Kyle nodded, then explained that his bloodline had an odd trait: their relatives that had passed, even from centuries before, were still around and they could all hear them. They inhabited whatever house the family did. Some just mumbled nonsense, but others offered advice and paid attention to your life. A couple living family members had tried moving cities to get away from all this, but after a week their ancestors always found them. It didn't have to do with location.

There were two family members where this went a step further, though. Both Kyle and his uncle could see them too. Some were faint and didn't talk much, and others were plain as you or me, but he saw them all over the house. He said it was part of why he was outside so much. The house felt crowded. I had all kinds of questions for him, like could he see ghosts around my house (he couldn't), was it hard to sleep (he wore ear plugs and an eye mask), and were any of them were scary (not really) or funny (his great uncle liked to play practical jokes on his sister because she startled easy).

But Kyle was different even from his uncle. Kyle learned that if he were touching someone else, they could see the ghosts too. At least a little bit. He had to concentrate to do it, but it was possible. He told me how he used to sit with his grandma and hold her hand so she could talk with her dead husband. It wore him out, but he liked her a lot and did it whenever she asked.

So naturally, I said, "Prove it."

He took me to the cellar door, which looked like no one had painted it in a lifetime, and opened it up. We stepped back and held hands, then stared into the dense dark of that staircase. My hand grew cold. It was the opposite of how my hands felt when I brought something back from beyond the curtain. And then I saw it. Her, I mean.

She was about thirty-five years old if I had to guess. She wore a puffy dress and a bonnet and held a bucket in her hand, the kind you milked cows with. The rest was hard to make out. I later learned it was his great, great grandmother. She turned her head and sharply said, "Who's there?!"

I yelped, loud and abrupt, surprising even myself, and started running. It had rained earlier so the driveway was slick and muddy. I almost fell, but Kyle caught me. We didn't stop until we reached the corner of our street, next to the half bent stop sign that the neighbor had hit with his car. He drank a lot.

Catching our breath, Kyle smiled at me real big and said, "Told ya." I punched him in the arm.









Dreams, like coins down a well, until I realized I was dumb for believing.  
To the bird with no flight, the skies don't ever offer respite. So I wander-  
ed off, and went to fill the holes in my shadows, but everything costs. The  
proof is etched into the backs of my hands. I heard you say that you'd lost  
your way. But I don't think you had much to lose; that house was never  
built for you. And I ain't gonna hang my head for them. And I ain't gonna  
let them paint the truth as sin. And I ain't gonna tell you it's okay 'cause  
at the end of the day, you were just something to blame. Face pressed into  
your hands. I couldn't tell if you were crying or laughing. They both sound  
the same when you ain't got no skin in the game. So I took up the fight, and  
the roaring in my head was like thunder, until I uncurled my fists and allow-  
ed myself to not give a damn. I heard you say that we'd lost our way. But I  
don't think we had much to lose; that path was never built for us. And I ain't  
gonna hang my head for them. And I ain't gonna let them pain the truth as  
sin. And I ain't gonna tell you it's okay when at the end of the day, you were  
just something to blame.

EVERYTHING COSTS



RESERVED

25. This song was originally for the younger sib-  
ling in the song "Sisters." But during the making  
of this album, my own family had a huge falling  
out that left me adopting a child and having to  
move, among other events. I did not intend to  
work myself into this fictional family tree so di-  
rectly, but life happens. This song is now from my  
own point of view.

See also: Bad Blood [31], Small Hands [41]









YOUR GUT SAYS TURN AWAY AND WALK BACK THE WAY YOU CAME  
 THAT THESE WOODS ARE NOT FOR THOSE AWAKE  
 I WATCH YOUR FEET STEP THROUGH THE FALLEN LEAVES  
 AND I HEAR YOUR HEART PLAY ITS BROKEN BEAT

AND I SMELL THE SICKNESS YOU'VE GOT IN YOU  
 AND I UNDERSTAND THE REASON WHY YOU CAME TO ME  
 AND I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'RE NOT AFRAID

YOU CALL MY NAME OUT SO I SHOW MY FACE  
 AND THE BIRDS IN THE NEST OF MY HAIR STARTED FLUTTERING  
 AND I HELD YOUR WRISTS, BOUND YOUR HANDS UP WITH VINES  
 AND I TOLD YOU TO TRUST ME AS THOUGH I WERE YOUR ENEMY  
 THEN I SUNK MY TEETH INTO YOUR RIBS  
 AND DREW OUT THE BLOOD THAT HAD TURNED ON YOU  
 AND LEFT YOU TO FIND YOUR WAY BACK HOME

AND I TOLD YOU TO GUARD OUR NEW SECRET WELL  
 AND TO NEVER TRY AND FIND ME AGAIN  
 BECAUSE THE NEXT TIME YOU STEP BEYOND YOUR WALLS

I'LL BE GONE

*Midnight*

26

26. In "Southern Snow", Gabriel mentions that his sister "walked into the woods and was never seen again." This is her song. She was born stranger than anyone else in the family and felt most comfortable far away from civilization. She spends her time with animals, or alone. But like weeds, rumors of her always spring forth from the homes she finds.

The song follows a young boy dying of leukemia. He's heard rumors that there's a witch in the woods with odd powers, and in a last ditch effort, decides to seek her help. She reveals herself, hears his story, and after some deliberation bites into his flesh and sucks the cancer from his blood. He is saved, but she must leave and find a new home, both for her safety and sense of peace.

See also: Southern Snow [20]

some say our dreams are a distant road  
 down which our hearts would like to go  
 but I have always stayed in place  
 under that old illusion that it's safe  
 you said the ship in port is the safer one  
 but it's not the reason it was made  
 so forgive me if I wander off  
 and forgive me more if I just stay

sing another song for the lost ones  
 we're the ones who need it the most  
 every time you run it'll cost ya  
 but it doesn't stop us running - the ship in port

if a coward dies a thousand times  
 then there's a graveyard in my head  
 because it took me years to say the words  
 that you did not even need said

sing another song for the lost ones  
 we're the ones that need it the most  
 nothing that you fear is forgotten  
 it follows you around like ...

THEN EVERYTHING DANCED TO A STRANGER TUNE. WE FOUND OUR  
 SONG AND WE FOUND OUR TRUTH. AND NOW THAT WE KNOW IT'S THAT  
 WE ALWAYS KNEW. FAREWELL TO THE CHAINS WE WERE BORN INTO.  
 AND AS WE DANCED AMONG THE ASHES OF OUR LIVES WE LAUGHED IT  
 OFF. AND AS WE BURNED OUR TINY WORLDS WE FOUND THE OCEAN  
 JUST BEYOND THOSE PAPER WALLS.



27

27. Richard Applegate, from "Servants and Kings", also narrates this song. Upon returning home from war, he finds he no longer fits in with his small, conservative town. But he does not leave, and instead does what's expected of him by his family. He struggles, feeling like a fraud and a coward, until he falls for another man who convinces him to start living for what he believes in.

See also: Servants and Kings [34]



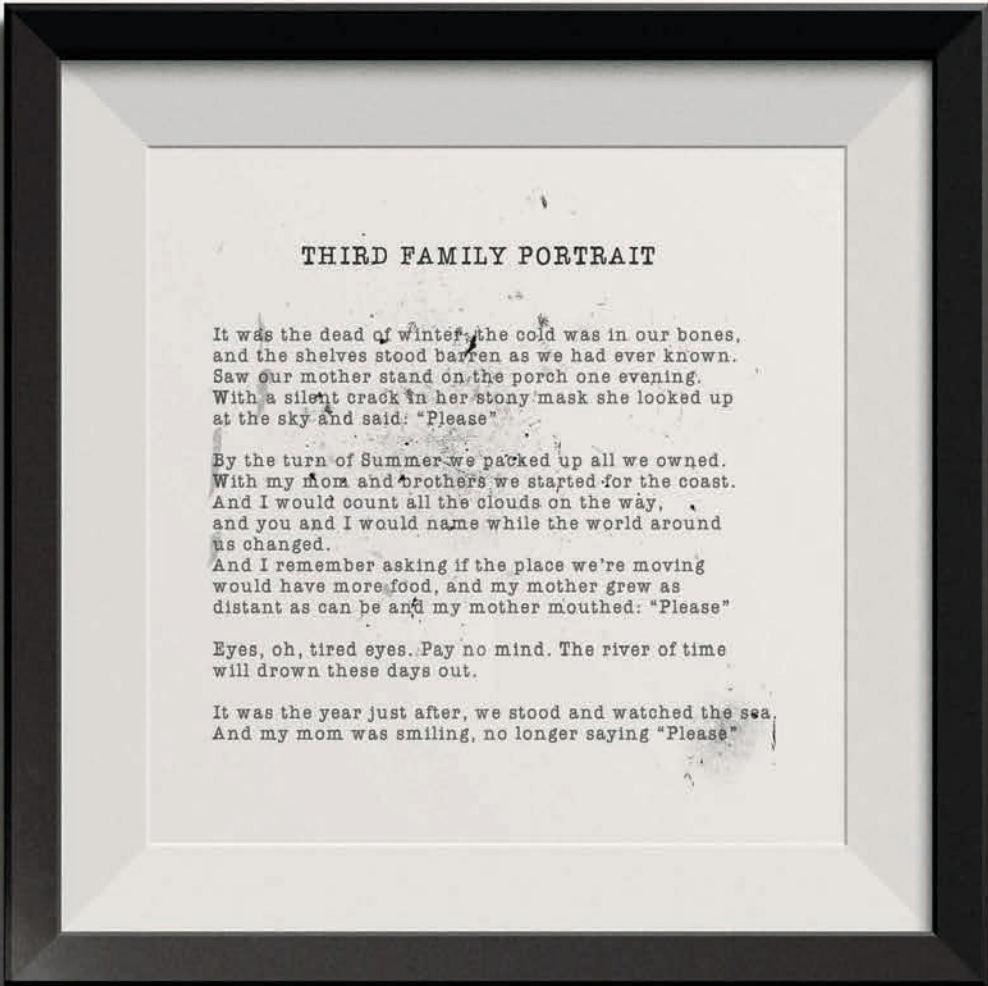


t h e s e   W o o d s   a r e   n o t   f o r   t h o s e   a w a k e



28. Genevieve and her husband did not make it to the coast in “West.” They settled down in Colorado and made a family there. Her husband died of infection after their youngest son was born. That son, Wyatt, narrates this song, where they left their home and finished the journey Genevieve and her husband had started all those years ago. They settle in California.

See also: All Is Well [35/36], West [40]



29. Before Abel had his head injury in “From the Mouth of an Injured Head”, he fathered a son that he never met. His bastard, Patrick, was collected by The Gilded Hand for experiments. Patrick, like his distant relative Abigail, is a “sleepwalker”, in that odd things happen to him in his sleep. He often wakes to find messages written on the walls of his tiny room by his own hand, and they always come true. One morning, he wakes to find The Gilded Hand dead, his hands caked with blood. Completely by accident, he has freed all the other children in the factory, and by default, becomes their leader.

See also: The Gilded Hand [22], Reminders [15], From the Mouth of an Injured Head [19]







Evening in the garden, surrounded by fireflies. We'd only just moved in.  
I spent my time alone there reading and planted one thing a day.  
While shoveling the yard, my spade hit a metal box.  
And in it was a diary, the cover old and frayed.

It said ...

I don't know how much time I have. But I guess we never really do.  
I thought that I would be terrified. But it's worse to watch them watching.  
Sometimes I wish our lives were simpler. That we never had to stretch the food  
that people here would treat my brother well. And that he would know he's good.

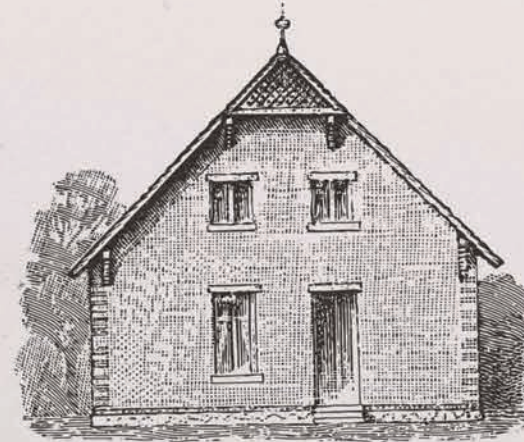
I laid out all those pages and in my study typed them up.  
It was tough to say how old they were. I guessed sixty years at least.  
The boy who wrote these words was an odd and complicated mind.  
But wisdom's often heavier when found before its time.

He said ...

We all get stuck in circles, but nothing moves in perfect lines.  
Connections unravel the things we see, but for naivices we're blind.  
I am never singular. I was born a pair but walk alone.  
My mirror shows the things I'm not, but he helps me feel at home.



-old gemini



bad blood

the hole in the floorboards. the cot near the front door.  
the moon was gone from site. the world was dark as nightmare

you took all my fears and you wrapped them in wonders  
but there's no magic inside the moon  
it's just a rock you can't reach

i was never the sharp knife, but i was never the dull mind  
i was somewhere in between a thorn and aquiescent  
so you said it was for me when you tried to break me  
but you can save your breath  
i know i'm not the kind you pray for

it took a river of bad blood, but now i see where we came from  
can't grow a proper branch when half the trunk is rotten  
and you swore that it hurt you while pushing your knife through  
well you can save your breath  
i know we're not the kind you'll pray for

30. Seventy years after the events in "Severus and Stone", a woman named Leslie Corbin buys the abandoned home that Victoria Northcote and her children (Abigail, Severus and Stone) used to inhabit. While gardening one day, her spade hits a metal box. It had been buried there by Stone, many years before. Severus, to help Stone ease his survivor's guilt and finally allow him to pass on, forced Stone to bury any reminders of him while Stone was asleep. One such item was Severus's diary, which Leslie stumbled upon. Leslie read it, struck by the wisdom of a boy so young. He knew he was going to die long before his mother and brother, and wrote very clearly about it.

See also: Severus and Stone [6], Holy Branches [12]

31. The last song in the Family Tree project is my own. This was not my original intention, but life events in 2015 brought a lot of old, dark memories into the spotlight again and I found myself reevaluating a lot of my past. There are many personal elements woven throughout this entire project, but this song is directly about my own family history. The original plan was to end with some grand statement, but life rarely moves in a straight line, and plans change. I've learned not to rail against it. This is where I've landed. I don't regret the trip.

See also: Everything Costs [25], Small Hands [41]



# *The Bastards*





# SISTERS

I tied your shoes while you sat and watched the rain  
 hands folded across your lap  
 and the dull look of peace across your face  
 mom, down the hall, bible pressed to her chest  
 she swore the devil hides in everything  
 and her room was the only safe haven left  
 she watched us grow through window panes

*(something in the middle, something in the middle,  
 something in the middle, something's in the way)*

you held my hand while the wind whistled nocturnes in the dark  
 we never knew what it meant to be holy  
 but we knew what we lost if we strayed from paths only they could see  
 sink or swim is all they'd say

your hand rode the wind out the window of the train  
 we slept in our seats with our knees curled beneath our dirty chins  
 dad gripped the bags like they might fly away  
 and the scenery beyond the glass was liquid  
 and we sat and soaked it in  
 I felt your breath along the way

I'd hold your hand when the sky fell apart  
 and you'd hold my hand if you felt me slipping back into the dark  
 can't tell from the ground if the sky will fall  
 can't tell from the sky if there's anybody down there at all  
 it's empty hands or empty plates

32

32. The second of Abigail's three daughters, Katelyn, left home when she was fourteen. She believed oddities in her family line were wicked and didn't fit with her newly found religion, so she moved in with her cousin's family on the coast, the Applegates. She eventually married and had two daughters of her own, but her paranoia about their strange bloodline only grew with time. This song is narrated by her oldest daughter, during the time their father took them from her to live with their two aunts.

See also: The Dead Waltz [9], Second Family Portrait [37]

For more details, see the short story: Sisters

# BAPTISMS

back when I used to wander, I was always out looking for signs  
 but they were never there, so I'd pull them from the air  
 we all believe in something, but like you, I can't say why  
 it's just a whisper in our ear, or a bottle for our fears

hold me to the light and let me shine  
 come hold to the floor and say it's alright  
 come hold me 'neath the water's skin until I'm new again

I said what I was thinking: that you can't see what's good 'til it's gone  
 and there's something to be said for a place to lay your head  
 you told me I was simple, and you envied me that peace of mind  
 then we listened to the creek, and it did much more for me

I'll hold you to the light and let you shine  
 I'll hold you against the floor and say it's alright  
 cause down beneath the water's skin, where we will swim  
 there's diamonds on the surface  
 and they'll come paint us both new again

these day I barely wander, and I don't need no more of them signs  
 I'll just breath in all that air, and be happy that it's there



33

33. The two boys, Jim and Bailey, from "Summer Skeletons" are still friends as adults. Bailey narrates this one. Though he still does not speak often, Bailey does his best to comfort his friend as they sit and fish beside the creek near their home.

To follow Bailey and Jim, see: Summer Skeletons [16],  
 Rivers in the Dust [24]







# Sisters

Elsa was always different. I think my mother's reaction would've made more sense if this were *not* the case. But mother was driven by things I will never understand. Or perhaps I have run out of energy and no longer care. One could make arguments for either, I suppose.

Being six years elder, I remember Elsa when she was very young. And there were already signs. Plenty of toddlers put odd things in their mouths, I know, but Elsa *only* did so with plants. No buttons, dog toys, or silverware, and she despised pacifiers. She simply would not have them. Once she was through breastfeeding, that was the end of the line for everything but food. And plants. I remember pointing this out my mother and she scolded me for "*thinking such nonsense!*" I brought it up one more time, and my punishment was so severe that I kept those thoughts to myself from that point on.

Mother was as devout as they come. She rarely made it three sentences without interjecting the words "Lord" or "Jesus" or some variation thereof, and by the time I was eight I never saw her without a bible nearby. She carried it like a shield against all darkness. Whenever she was nervous she would trace the front cover's inlay with the middle finger of her left hand, whispering to herself. She would quote scripture like a scholar and used it to answer any question that came up. I remember thinking she no longer had original thoughts, only quotes. Perhaps that was her intention.

Looking back, all of this strikes me as rampant insecurity and delusion, if not outright mental illness. But I have my biases.

My father harbors a patience that I find equally confusing, only I love him dearly for it. He was never one to rush to conclusions. In anything. He would always hear us out, Elsa and I, even when he knew were in the wrong. Not to imply he was lenient in his punishments or easy to sway -- far from it! -- but his responses never felt emotional or reactionary. They were reasonable, and for me, trustworthy. He extended so much patience toward my mother as well, and even though it did not work out and I feel his grace was wasted in her case, I still admire him for it. He had a reputation as a wonderful teacher and I never once doubted it.

Until the incident in the bathroom, we spent our lives in a small house near the coast, all winding sidewalks and afternoon thunderstorms. But a crack began to show around when Elsa started walking, and our homelife outright shattered just after she turned five.

I was the first to see Elsa do it. She was sitting, Indian-style, in front of a sapling that had sprouted near the edge of mother's garden. She looked at it multiple ways, tilting her head back and forth like a puppy, then smiled wide and grabbed the stem. And I swear upon everything dear to me, right before my eyes, it grew. A month's growth in a span of ten seconds. Elsa laughed like she were being tickled, then let go and rubbed her hands together.

"Elsa!" I shouted.

I was elated for a moment, until a thought stampeded through my head was: *what will mother say?*

"I'm sorry, Elsa," I whispered fiercely. "Please don't be upset. But this is necessary."

I pulled the no-longer-a-sapling out of the ground and tossed it over the fence. My mother knew her garden much too well to leave evidence. I thought Elsa might cry, but she barely noticed. She just waddled through the garden as though nothing had happened.

I watched her closely from then on.

It wasn't as difficult as I expected, I must admit. Around that time, my mother's agoraphobia manifested. It started in small ways, like with the aforementioned tick of tracing the seal on her bible. Then she felt something *very unholy* when she was at the General's General Store down the street and would no longer shop there. She suspected it was the stock boy, whom she'd never seen at church, not once. I pointed out that he was from India and probably Hindu, but she just shushed me. My father picked up the slack and started shopping on his walk home from work.

And so it went, with my mother finding more and more places that Satan's influence was growing. My father would try to speak to her rationally for a week or two, then would take the task on himself. Rinse and repeat.



In time, my mother no longer felt comfortable on the drive to church, so she would call our Pastor three times a week for conference. While this made our house feel strained and covered everything in an miasma of paranoia, it made hiding Elsa's gift significantly easier. My mother would sometimes peer at us from her bedroom window while we were in the yard, and she would check in on us around meal times, but that was the extent of our interactions. That's not to say I wasn't a nervous wreck every time we went outside, though. I watched Elsa with the intensity of a brain surgeon anytime she was in eye-line of mother's window. There were some close calls, but all said and told it was not terribly difficult to navigate.

Until one Thursday evening when Elsa was given a bath.

My mother was completely housebound at this point and only left her room to make meals or clean. But, oh, how she missed her garden! She said this to my father often, as though it were a thousand miles away and not right outside our own back door. As a surprise, my father made a cutting from her favorite succulent, potted it, and placed it on the painted ledge beneath the bathroom window, the one above the bathtub that held the soap dish. Mother adored it and for a few weeks, she left her room more often. I remember thinking things were taking a better turn.

Soon after mother decided to wash Elsa instead of asking me to. I would have praised her for this had it not gone so awry. As mother was washing her back, probably wondering aloud how she always managed to get so dirty, Elsa touched the flower-shaped succulent. And like that, my mother saw how different her youngest truly was.

Mother's scream shook me from the trance of my studies. It took me a moment to place where it came from, but I quickly sorted that she was in the bathroom. There was such terror in her shriek that I did not bother to knock or ask what was wrong. Deep in my gut I knew it was about Elsa, so I simply barged into the bathroom.

Mother's hands were vice-like around Elsa's throat as she held her under the water. I could see the veins in her neck from where her hair was pulled back. Elsa was thrashing, sending water over the edge of the tub. I screamed for mother to stop, but if she heard me she gave no sign. She was still screaming herself, after all, and it was the text from the *Twenty-Third Psalm*. An anger that I had never felt before rose up in me, white hot and electric, and I slapped my mother with such force she stopped making all sound -- and more importantly, let go of Elsa. Before she could do anything else, I pulled Elsa up, wrapped her in my arms and whisked her out of the bathroom. My mother watched us go, wide-eyed with terror, then started screaming again. I slammed the door.

I brought the sputtering and crying Elsa to our shared bedroom, wrapped her in a blanket as fast as I could manage and grabbed my chair from beneath my desk. I ran down the hall and slammed the chair beneath the doorknob so my mother could not leave. Then I tended to the whimpering Elsa until my father came home a half hour later.

---

It is still hard for me to understand why my father did not have her committed. It is not that he didn't believe me. When he came home and saw the state Elsa was in, he let me hysterically recount the evening's events before he tended to my mother, and I saw no doubt in his face. If anything, I think it confirmed his fears. But instead of making mother leave, he decided that the three of us would go. He spent the bulk of his savings finding her a care taker, then purchased train tickets for us to stay with his two sisters, four hours west.

He explained some things to me on the train, holding our bags in front of him like they might get stolen, even though the train was largely empty. I wondered what was in them, but didn't ask. Elsa slept on the seat next to me, her knees curled beneath her chin. She was handling this better than the rest of us.

My mother was not born into a normal family, he explained. Odd traits showed up in two of her siblings, and one of her uncles was also not right. He would not tell me exactly what these traits were, only that they were "otherworldly." She left home at 14, because she never felt safe among her family. She was taken in by her cousin's family, who ran a small church out here on the coast.

My father met her there one summer, just before he entered college. He'd been hired to paint the fence surrounding the property, and he was smitten after just one sentence. But I already knew that story.

"She'd grown up with strange blood in her family, and she always hated it," he said. "To her, only Satan could bring forth such strangeness. Or wickedness, she'd say. We used to debate it some, until it became a non-topic. I loved her, and I pitied her, so I let it go. But she always feared that this blood was inside her, too. She admitted it to me once. It was the first time I'd ever seen her cry." He looked out the window until he'd collected himself. "She's so frightened of anything out of the ordinary, especially if it's related to her in any way."

"Did you know about Elsa?" I asked him. He was slow to answer.



"I suspected, but I hoped it wasn't the case. For your mother's sake. But I never ..." He took a deep breath and stared at his hands. "I never thought she'd go that far. Despite all the evidence in front of me. I never thought she'd hurt her. I didn't think she was capable."

We were quiet for a while. I noticed he couldn't look at Elsa.

"What are you gonna do with her?" I asked.

He must have heard accusation in my tone, because he looked stricken. "Watch her. Love her. Protect her. I don't care about any of this nonsense. She's my daughter, same as you. And no goddamn plants will ever change that."

I nodded, relieved.

---

We arrived at my Aunts' house late in the evening. Sandy and Gretta. The two of them had moved in together after Sandy's husband died ten years ago. Many mistook them for twins, but that's where the similarities ended. Sandy didn't talk much and Gretta rarely stopped.

Gretta was the one who answered the door. She practically lifted my father off the ground when she hugged him, then did the same to me. She was laughing and saying "goodness!" too much and was clearly glad to see us. She stopped when she saw Elsa.

"You were still in someone's tummy when I saw you last," she said, suddenly serious. Elsa blinked up at her. "Sandy! Put the kettle down and come meet little Elsa!"

Sandy came to the door, wearing a flour-dusted apron and her hair up in a bun. She looked down at Elsa with folded arms. "So this is the one who can help us with the gardening?"

Gretta laughed loudly, and so did my father and I.



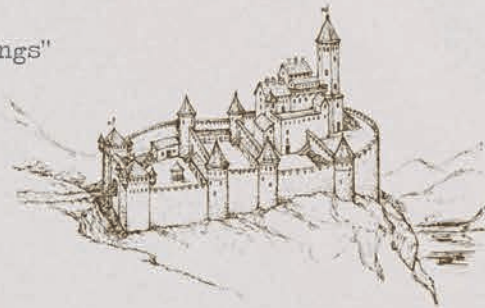


through rolling hills and many miles of blood  
we slept in the rainfall and marched through the mud  
and you were not like anyone I'd known  
you spoke with impunity and had nothing to atone  
and on quiet evenings you told me what you thought  
about servants and kings, and how everyone is bought  
and that no one's hands are bloodier than God's  
and I won't be judged for doing as I ought

it's hard to say just when I fell in love  
there was no epiphany, no light from above  
but you'd become my candle in the dark  
and all through that hell you were a shield across my heart  
and when all was fire and the world was out for blood  
and the boys still too young to drink were drowning in the flood  
and I'd hear you laugh and it was like coming up for air  
and I'd laugh with you, pretend I didn't care

it's been ~~ten~~ years since the last time I saw you  
when I kissed you on the mouth and walked away  
I knew that it would be too much, that it would scare you  
but I couldn't find the proper words for what I had to say  
I don't regret a thing

"servants and kings"



my life started slow, in a town of idle minds  
where daydreams filled the space between our simple dramas  
and my mom was strange, but she always liked to sew  
and all my clothes smelled like the room I was born in  
and my dad was calm, never used two words when one would do  
and my brother's hands were mischief bent with no will to stop them  
and on the whole, we lived simply and day to day  
our fears were trivial: they always died with every sunset

when I was twelve, my affliction came to light  
and I was told that some things I heard were only there in my head  
but I couldn't tell which were real and which were not  
and the question loomed over all I did: whether I could trust it  
and I guess over time it became too much  
and I was sent away at my mom's behest  
because she'd grown to fear me

now I live up north, in the house for the broken heads  
and my father comes and visits me whenever he can afford it  
sometimes at night, when the voices quiet down  
I find I hope that I am missed  
and that they haven't forgot me

SECOND FAMILY PORTRAIT

34. This song follows Richard Applegate, the older brother mentioned in "Second Family Portrait." He enlisted in the army during World War 1, against his parents wishes. He fell in love with a fellow soldier, whose manner was unlike anything he'd ever seen in his small-town religious upbringing. Richard never saw him again after returning from Europe.

To follow Richard, see: Second Family Portrait [37], The Ship in Port 28]

35. Narrated by Nathan, the youngest son of the Applegate family (the ones who took in Katelyn, the mother from the song "Sisters"), this song depicts his struggles with schizophrenia. The text comes from diary entries he'd written in the mental institution his mother had him committed to.

To follow this family line, see: Servants and Kings [34], Sisters [32]

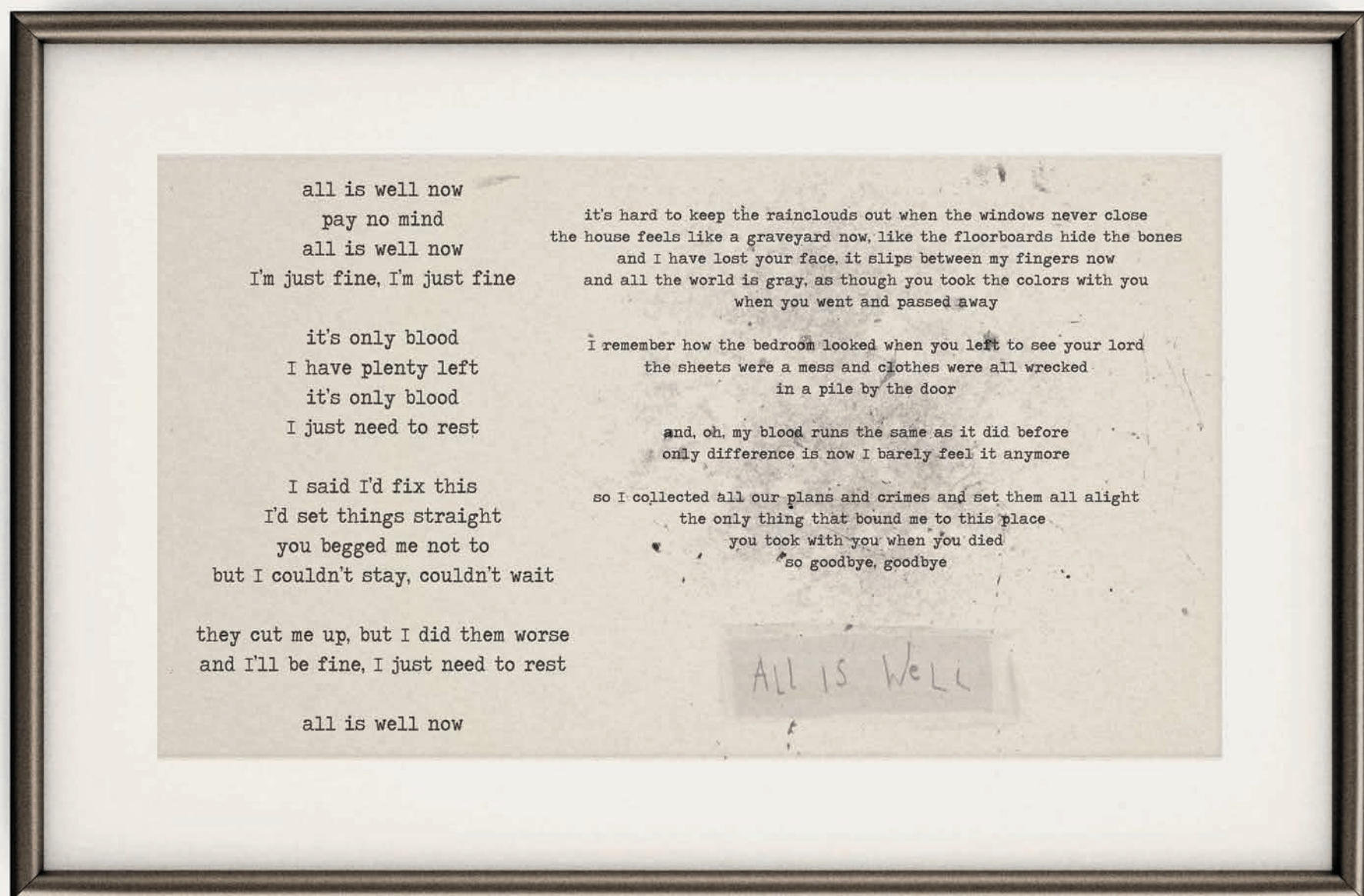






36/37. Narrated by William Northcote's daughter, Genevieve, who left home when her boyfriend found work on the coast. But when rumors about them living together out of wedlock got around the small, religious town, he got into a knife fight defending her name. Part 1 (It's Only Blood) plays as he is bleeding out in the bedroom of their tiny home. Part 2 (Goodbye, Goodbye) follows Genevieve in the aftermath, where she burns the house down and disappears.

To follow Genevieve, see: West [40]  
Third Family Portrait [28]



all is well now  
pay no mind  
all is well now  
I'm just fine, I'm just fine

it's only blood  
I have plenty left  
it's only blood  
I just need to rest

I said I'd fix this  
I'd set things straight  
you begged me not to  
but I couldn't stay, couldn't wait

they cut me up, but I did them worse  
and I'll be fine, I just need to rest

all is well now

it's hard to keep the rainclouds out when the windows never close  
the house feels like a graveyard now, like the floorboards hide the bones  
and I have lost your face, it slips between my fingers now  
and all the world is gray, as though you took the colors with you  
when you went and passed away

I remember how the bedroom looked when you left to see your lord  
the sheets were a mess and clothes were all wrecked  
in a pile by the door

and, oh, my blood runs the same as it did before  
only difference is now I barely feel it anymore

so I collected all our plans and crimes and set them all alight  
the only thing that bound me to this place  
you took with you when you died  
so goodbye, goodbye

All is Well









38. The final song of Stone, from "Severus and Stone". He is speaking to the young apprentice he took in and treats like a son. This is late in his life, after he finally let the memory of Severus go and accepted his current place in the world.

See also: Severus and Stone [6], Holy Branches [12]

39. Robert recieves the body of his son, Chase. He did not survive the shot to his stomach.

See also: Letters Home [18]

40. This follows Genevieve and her second husband as they travel west during the gold rush. They do not make it California due to their caravan being raided, and instead make a home in the mountains of Colorado. They lose contact with their family for many years.

To follow Genevieve's line, see: All Is Well [36/36], Third Family Portrait [28]









## SMALL HANDS

well the world might cut you down again, but you know the way back home  
and your best might not be good enough, but just know you're not alone  
and if you slip and lose your way again, I know that you will be alright  
you still gotta try

if you need come build your home in me, and you know I won't complain  
and I can't fix what was done to you, but I'll shield you from the rain  
and if the walls they built become too high, then step up on my back and climb

'cause I never mind  
no matter the day or time  
I never mind

and all the anchors that they hid inside your chest  
we will unravel all the chains and toss the remnants all down the drain  
and though my hands are much too small to hold you up  
I will be there to pick up the pieces and keep you housed while you mend them up

and if you wind up in the dark again, just turn and call my name  
and if the fire in your chest goes out, well, I'll hold you all the same  
and if you need to take this out on me, well you know I won't complain

41

41. This started as a follow-up to the song "Sisters", but the content changed after some heavy, personal life events. It became a letter to some of my loved ones.

See also: everything costs [25], Bad Blood [31]

## NIGHTCLOTHES

we crept from the room, moonlight spilled down the hall  
and I tip toed with you, and we climbed out the window  
and there in the yard, our night clothes blowin' in the breeze  
and you looked up at the sky, and said the moon would be ours

and all this time, I hear those words like bombs in the distance  
and oh, my, my, I can still smell the rain in the air  
but time's gone by, and I'm not the kid I was on that evening  
but somewhere inside, I hope you still see me just the way I was  
before I walked away

mud on your dress, blood stains on the knees of my pants  
and we went in search of the moon  
'cause you said you knew where it slept in the day  
and we gathered all our tools, a sling shot in case it ran for the sky  
and a blanket from your room, the one with no holes s  
so we could drag it all the way back home

and you said when we caught it that we would cut it up in two  
and we'd wear the halves on necklaces  
and then I could control the tides with you

and I still hear the way that you laughed when you found I believed you  
and I can still feel you pull on my arm when I was too afraid to go  
and all this time, I hear your words like bombs in the distance  
and my, oh my, I can still smell the dirt on our hands  
'cause in my head, you're still alive, you're still alive  
and I know that it's a lie, but it's one I like  
it's one I like

42

42. Abel, from "Reminders" and "From the Mouth of an Injured Head", had two children. The boy, Avery, narrates this song. It revolves around memories of him and his sister and the things they did as children, before she passed away unexpectedly.

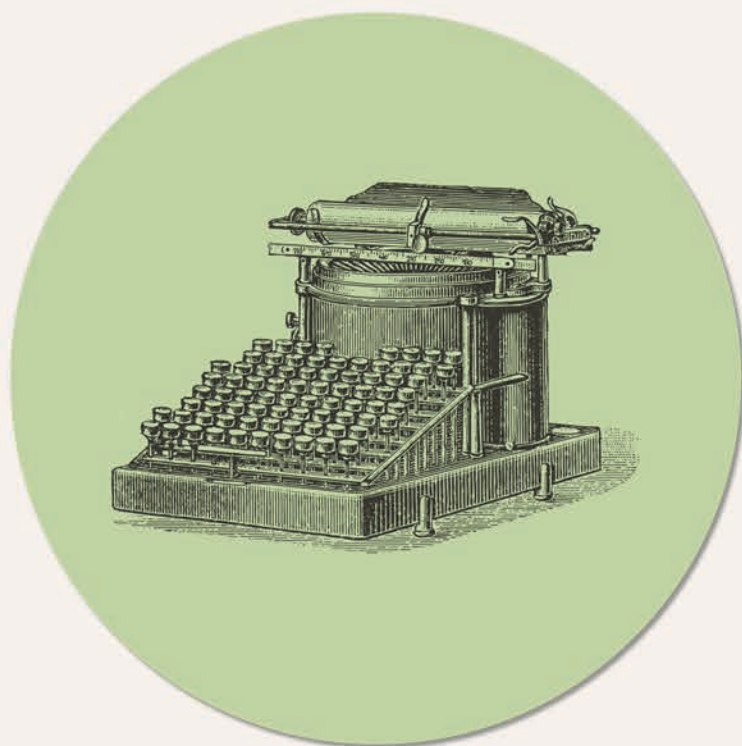
See also: Reminders [15], From the Mouth of an Injured Head [19]

(In memory of my sister, Hannah Cooper)









## Credits

All songs written, recorded, performed and mixed:  
Ben Cooper

### Additional performances:

Josh Lee - Viola Da Gamba on 16, 17, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 37

Anthony Anurca - Bassoon on 19, 26

Emeral Cooper - Piano on 9

Robin Rutenberg - Vocals on 25, 30

### Artwork:

Gordon McBryde

### Book design:

Ben Cooper

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