

## THE BICYCLE ROOM

The man in the woods  
holds his arms out like handlebars  
and imagines someone riding him  
like a bicycle  
—some pretty girl  
who could use her long hair to turn him magically.  
She would shine him every day after school.  
In the sunlight  
he would look so pretty  
turning in her hands.

# ONE SATURDAY AFTERNOON BEFORE I WAS BORN

I was building telescopes from Billy the Kid magazines.

There was an issue where Colonel Dudley had Billy and the Regulators trapped in a house and Dudley had his men set the house on fire. Damn that Colonel. But Billy the big bad water tower that he was broke out of there, escaped. The gang headed for the hills, crossed the mountains in one night, the stars like white animals too far to tell what they were. Billy and the boys hid out in Telegraph Cave. McSween was shot up pretty bad and asked Big Jim French to shoot him. What could Big Jim do? The two of them were like brothers. He went outside so no one would see him cry. They had to head on though before they could bury McSween proper-like, only had time to pile stones over his body. It was real sad-like.

At the back of the pages was an ad for building your own telescope. It said how you could order it and put it together and when you did you could look up into the sky and see the stars real close-up and could make out all the constellations and they had a list of the constellations like Draco the dragon and Scorpius which is a scorpion. No constellation of Billy the Kid or any other cowboys but they had one called Orion who I found out was a warrior that killed Scorpius. I thought how much I would like to see some of those stars closer up. I'd been saving up my money for the past few months to get a real honest to God air rifle like the Watkin Brothers but I thought I might like that there telescope more so I cut out the ad and sent all my money in with it.

I think they sent me the wrong kit.

The instructions were for a short-wave radio. At least that's what it looked like in the picture. I made it anyway. When it was done, I took it into the field past the house. It was Friday night. No one was around. I turned on the radio. There was only static. Across the whole dial, nothing but static. I wondered if it was broken. I wondered if I had put it together wrong. Then a quiet voice, a man's voice sounding real country-like, something like my Pops would listen to, came out through the static. It was still too fuzzy to make out what the words were but I kinda liked it. The sky was so blue and dark it was like the inside of a magician's hat and everything had spilled out. I sat there in the high grass and listened to that nameless country singer singing something I couldn't understand. Them stars were real close.

# 1

Such birds, such GREAT BIRDS  
sit in the sky of your neck.  
When close to me,  
as you sleep as you move—  
how I watch them.

# THE FEATHERS

1.

I was born with them in my arms.

Would stay up at night plucking them all out, didn't want the other kids to see them. Back when I was four I was in the yard and some boys from down the street saw me.

*Hey bird.*

*You! Bird boy!*

*You chicken? You taste like chicken?*

*I like my chicken fried.*

They tried to cook me. I have a crooked ear from the flames.

Ever since, I always pluck them out. Every few nights they grow back. And I pluck again.

2.

From the darkness outside I hear the geese in the field. I watch for them in the sky, balancing the moon on their backs. On clear nights the world above me looks like an ocean, an upside-down bowl of blackness spilling onto all of us, ready to cave in. I listen for the hiss of the stars, the sound of their gas escaping, waiting for their deflated skin to fall to the earth.

3.

After the plucking my arms are always covered in little red bumps. My mother is starting to look at me strangely—my father always has. I think Mom thought that one day they would stop growing, that one day they would just be gone. Every birthday of mine her eyes dim a little more with each approaching realization: perhaps her son is a mistake, perhaps God used her body to cough a boy out.

4.

I collect them in a crate in my closet. They are heavier than one might think. Yes, they're light enough to make the bird mock gravity. But when so many of them weave their waves over the arms the body begins to drag, the bones begin to heavy. When my skin is barren of them, I can feel every part of the wind pushing through every part of me. When they grow back full I can't sleep. I move about and feel like I'm moving through water.

5.

When the crate is full I empty it into a large bag that I keep hidden in the shed. There is an abandoned airstrip behind the house—when the bag is full I go there and make a small mountain from the bag's contents. I light the pile. I wait for the plume of smoke to fill the whole sky. It colors the clouds with the blackness of the burning. But there is never enough smoke. The feathers become ash. When I head back home with the bag, I leave the ash behind.

6.

One night the geese stop talking. I strain to listen. I hear the hissing stars. I stare out the window and see a light in the atmosphere darken and fall, flying to the earth like a bleeding balloon. Leaping from bed I run to the air strip. Upon the ground I find what looks like a dead white cat stitched from light. The star breathes brokenly, its chest rising and falling. I pick it up and start rubbing it over my arms—wringing drops of it onto my shoulders, kneading the drops into the skin, hoping to kill all this that grows out of my limbs, wishing the things I pull out of me I'll lose, finally washed free of this heavy coat, and come morning my body will be smooth.