

or you can laugh into my disposition,  
but my mom will still see me  
as her wide-eyed wanderer  
out behind the garage  
inventing ways to fend off dog attacks  
that will probably never happen.  
I picked the scabs from my knees  
because Mom said it would leave a scar ...

*Awesome.*

## CONVERSATION WITH STEVEN ARROWOOD

BUDDY: Maybe I can't get as far with honesty.

STEVE: Guess it depends where you're going.

## TAUGHT

In the third grade,  
Coach Hendrix dumped a parachute onto the gymnasium floor  
and had us spread it out flat  
like a bed sheet  
for windmills.

Whole class stood curious  
all the way around the edge of it,  
knelt down when he told us to  
and gripped on with both hands tight.

Taut.

Not letting go  
on the count of three,  
we flung our arms above our heads  
and ran into the middle.

Hear me when I tell you look up,  
and a little at the way you're breathing,  
colliding in the middle again.  
Today it's not kickball and win.

Loose up.

A pocket of air is unfolding  
from the way you're withholding love.  
If you mean it to speak black hole like that  
there will be no word for warmth.

Mean it to speak your form.  
When the safety comes to greet us  
you will know it did not come easy.  
Go easy on this.

Explain nothing.

Hold still from retelling the tragedy.  
Resistance quits colliding.  
Good god resenting safety  
has become unnecessary.

Dove teeth sunk in a parking lot.  
Festival face in a blanket fort.  
Floodlight lasting fastly.  
A carnival held in a cup.

Coach Hendrix

watched me run into the red  
with nearly every blackout.  
All the endings gave me blackouts.  
All the blackouts gave me back.

## **PARABLE WHISTLE**

So this guy's walking next to his friend, the snake,  
and the snake bites him,  
and the guy acts like he can't believe that his friend just bit him,  
and his friend says,  
"You knew I was a snake."

## **HURLING CROWBIRDS AT MOCKINGBARS** *(HOPE IS NOT A COURSE OF ACTION)*

If we were created in God's image,  
then when God was a child  
He smushed fire ants with his fingertips  
and avoided tough questions.  
There are ways around being the go-to person,  
even for ourselves,  
even when the answer is clear,  
like the holy water Gentiles would drink  
before they realized,

"Forgiveness is the release of all hope for a better past."

I thought those were chime shells in your pocket  
so I chucked a quarter at it,

hoping to hear some part of you respond on a high note.  
You acted like I was hurling crowbirds at mockingbars,  
then abandoned me for not making sense.  
Evidently, I don't experience things as rationally as you do.

For example, I know mercy  
when I have enough money to change the jukebox  
at a gay bar.  
You know mercy  
whenever someone shoves a stick of morphine  
straight up into your heart.  
It felt amazing  
the days you were happy to see me.

So I smashed a beehive against the ocean  
to try and make our splash last longer.  
Remember all the honey  
had me lookin' like a jellyfish ape,  
but you,  
you walked off the water  
in a porcupine of light,  
strands of gold  
drizzled out to the tips of your wasps.  
This is an apology letter to the both of us  
for how long it took me to let things go.

It was not my intention to make such a production  
of the emptiness between us,  
playing tuba on the tombstone of a soprano  
to try and keep some dead singer's perspective alive.  
It's just that I coulda swore you sung me a love song back there  
and that you meant it,  
but I guess some people just chew with their mouth open.

So I ate ear plugs alive with my throat  
hoping they'd get lodged  
deep enough inside the empty spots

that I wouldn't have to hear you leaving,  
so I wouldn't have to listen to my heart keep saying  
all my eggs were in a basket of red flags,  
all my eyes to a bucket of blindfolds,  
in the cupboard with the muzzles and the gauze.  
You know I didn't mean to speed so far out and off  
trying to drive your nickels to a well  
when you were happy to let them wishes drop.

But I still show up for gentleman practice  
in the company of lead dancers  
hoping  
their grace will get stuck in my shoes.  
Is that a handsome shadow on my breath, sweet woman,  
or is it a cattle call in a school of fish?  
Still dance with me,  
less like a waltz for panic,  
more for the way we'd hoped to swing  
the night we took off everything  
and we were swingin' for the fences.

Don't hold it against  
my love.  
You know I wanna breathe deeper than this.  
I didn't mean to look so serious.  
Didn't mean to act like a filthy floor.  
Didn't mean to turn us both into some cutting board.  
But there were knives stuck  
in the words where I came from.  
Too much time in the back of my words.  
I pulled knives from my back and my words.  
I cut trombones from the moment you slipped away.

And I know it left me lookin' like a knife fight, lady.  
Boy, I know it left me feelin' like a shotgun shell.  
You know I know I mighta gone and lost my breath.  
But I wanna show you how I found my breath to death.

It was buried under all the wind instruments  
hidden in your castanets.

Goddamn.

If you ever wanna know how it felt when ya left,  
if ya ever wanna come inside,  
just knock on the spot  
where I finally pressed stop  
playing musical chairs with your exit signs.  
I'm gonna cause you a miracle  
when you see the way I kept God's image alive—

“Forgiveness is for anyone who needs safe passage through my mind.”

If I really was created in God's image,  
then when God was a boy  
He wanted to grow up to be a man,  
a good man.  
And when God was a man,  
a good man,  
He started telling the truth in order to get honest responses.  
He'd say, “Yeah,  
I know ...  
I really shoulda wore my cross  
again,  
but I don't wanna scare the Gentiles off.”

That is not what I came here to do.  
I'm pretty sure, I came here to love you.

## WHAT DO YOU PEOPLE DO?

When I was a child,  
the first thing I would do upon entering someone's home  
is ask them where they kept the toys.  
If they said that they did not have any toys  
I'd be like, "What the *fuck*?!"