

# S A I N T T I M O T H Y

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Come visit—if wished—O please. To gain my heart, to gain my snuggery in my castle keep, to crawl in beside me under corduroy and burlap and wool, to flank me with fondness, to navigate my bloodstream, one must gauntlet time. To feel my words in throat and pulse in loins, to spoon my form and span my dreams, one needs verve. Come from wherever to the rim of my vale, this ungreening glen of private wonder. Bring earnestness in a satchel and marvel in one's pockets, and may strife and success in striving see-saw our tomorrows. My days will be counted and my hair may be mussed. Scatter my sheep from the path with a smacking of hands. Quiet my dogs with sweetmeats. Bring fervor. Chew a hole through my outer wall.

In my slumpy cozy, in my man nest, spleens are soothed, tongues loosed. Let's quiver thighs, not lips. Let's synchronize spines. Tell me tales of travel genius. Quicken my heart. Don't come to my fortress with arrows spent and quiver empty. Survey my highlands under brooding clouds. Wander my heather in frontal light. Toss helpless wishes into my fountains. Flourish in my candle flicker. Sleep in my ferment. Wake to freedom chimes.

To gain my heart one must gain my rumped nook, if only to slumber. One must cross the emptiness of my remote vale without falling prey to my calculated beast. This beast rises from its bottomless pit and values my solitude. It won't kill, but it will maim—carefully, with forethought. Under its tongue, in a flannel pouch, it harbors the sharpness I'll tool to open my heart when my time comes to leave.

This beast—if it can be fooled, if it can be out-fought, if it can be circumvented—unlike my dogs, can't be bribed. Time mustn't be one's enemy or one's stink will reach its nostrils.

My words are built to flay without pain, to induce shedding—patina seduction, layer by layer, to the raw. Language is catapulted as turpentine across my landscape. When the snuggery is burnished to exhaustion, come with me to the spiral tower atop the tallest peak above my vale. Let us peer across the human world to witness all of us and ours.

Here we are, be it known—some of us isolate ourself in desert stark, in storyless sweep of grit and glare, swallow and wait, waterless oceans of ancient living and future sundering. We reject the shade of the family tree. We bake our thoughts in hushy air. We yawn under constellations and peer at ants. Some of us integrate ourself in forests old, in story old of star and cross, stone and shroud, love and resurrection and sinny wonderment. We reject the thrills of the knowledge tree. We spread our words to the far corners of the flooded fields. We still suffer heartache and heartburn and heartrend. Some of us invest ourself in civil clamor, in storyful cornets of wit and loss, ascent and fall, boulevards of ambition and penthouse picnics of loneliness. We reject the ease of blankets under roadside trees. We clink glasses in gleaming array and sparkle our eyes. Some of us sweat in the brimstone fields. Some of us tarry in suburban lint. Some of us bleed in national trenches. Some of us wallow in thuggery and swill. Some of us never get to open our eyes but all of us who do get to close them. Some of us wake to sunshine on the day of our undoing.

We drip a slow drop at a time from our human glacier. We shape the landscape and we raise the seas. We disappear into an atmosphere of something from something, a universal system, the mutable within the immutable. We are damaged and steeped in hurtability. We are mumps and courtship and aneurysm and we are uneraseable. We origin ourself of carbons and oceans and apes. Some of us still seek

shelter under trees in lightning storms. We still let the mean and stupid propagate. We still need bodies. We still kill some of our killers. We still kill some of our unborn. We still want our children to be healthy and happy. We touch shoulders in the cinema where the floor is sticky under our shoes. We cradle ourself in our bedtime story. We stroke brow. We pat hand. Here comes the horizon.

Some of us still quarry our childhoods. We go swimming in our former waters. Some of us still autobiography ourselves as if seeking justice. Our wise men failed to show when our little nite-lites shone. Now our evening air settles us into sitting room melancholia or we whirling dervish down the wide boulevards away from fame. Some of us are cartographers of one another's flaws. Our cemeteries are yesterday's suns. Our deaths fit like party hats. Some of us believe we are sinners at conception and some of us believe we aren't anything until birth and some us believe we are perfect in the fullness of time. Good works clatter on the junk dealer's cart. We pray for the future as if convinced the past were untouchable even by almighty power. A limited divinity haunts our now. Some of us trust in tradition and some of us lust after innovation and some of us consider tradition to be the history of innovation. Some of us feel we go round and round and some of us lie in our twilight beds in moist imagination decorating promised rooms in that heavenly mansion of bleating cheer. There are those of us who think we can think ourselves out of ourself.

Let us now muse ourself under the weighty covers where our secrets smell of proximity. The light from the lantern between our chests pools at our navels whilst we ink our skin and our hair whitens into pillows of cloud. In the morrow—should the morrow bring summer to my vale—we shall stand on my parapets and watch an afternoon storm progress toward our comprehension. One of us might thunder, if one of us were of a mind to, the tales of Timmy Lightning—and one of us might illuminate, if one of us were so inclined, the rumbling revelations of Timmy Thunder. Masters of lightning and thunder,

Timmy and Timmy, those two alter superegos of cause and effect, the bold bolt and the tumbly messenger. To be struck from the ramparts, lifted out of one's shoes and stretched out in the clover alongside one's host or guest—to be one's only cause and one's every effect—this is the choice of the imagined creator. Draw Timmy Lightning upon my chest—a spitting image of a pavement crack, a self-splitting of the sky, a broken-hearted companion.

Then, zippedy zap out of a clear night sky—Timmy Lightning, electric justice. And Timmy Thunder rattles the windows and shakes the walls and flips the stomachs of the lowlanders as he scurries them under their beds. Timmy Thunder tells of Timmy Lightning splitting a watchman ziggedy zag from pole to pole and sending the heart's magma down upon the village as consuming love. Don't think he can't reach us in our marital cellars or sexual closets or union bunkers. He has channels and streamers to all epidermal bark and each spinal conductor and every set of lungs—so sayeth Timmy Thunder. Every forest begs a spark for a raging fire to rejuve its greening verve. Together the Timmys augment a summer storm—the radiant flash and the loyal kaboom.

Next to my snuggery is a hewn work-table for rigor and sweat and strategy. It is from there—with mechanical pencils and strips of varicolored graphpaper—that I epistle my friend, Timothy. I tell him that as mortals we don't understand our mortality. I tell him if I were to ever leave my vale it would be for a canvas sling on the salty sea or a linen wrap in the desert wash. I invite him to visit my castle keep, and to bring his sweetheart, Timothea, if that is her given reflexion, and if he thinks my beast will leave her alone. I scribble my name in the signatures to match his in the salutations and I post the tight scrolls by pigeon. By candlelight I peruse the scriptures of a caravanserai and the logs of a doomed galleon fleet. My oasis and my doldrums cool my spirit and bleach my soul. Timothy, a bruin of a man, a friend of a lifetime, will come, I promise myself. My glen may russet into

snow and melt into bloom and wilt into swelter, but he will come in worthy shoes and my beast will recognize his slack odor and grant him passage.

Some of us drown ants and some of us drown puppies and some of us drown our children. Some of us patricide and some of us matricide and some of us fratricide and some of us deicide and some of us suicide. Some of us kill time wearing drawstring trousers in breezy salons. Some of us starve to death. Some of us still bite our fingernails and some of us still grind our teeth and some of us still crack our knuckles and some of us still bang our heads against walls. Some of us still preach in triplicate and some of us don't. We sleep on our backs and fail to observe shooting stars. We sleep on our sides and drool onto our pillows. We sleep on our bellies and dream of planetary arousal.

Storytime always takes place before snuggery sleep, even when I'm alone. Timmy Thunder rumbles on about the day Timmy Lightning ignored a barefoot widower standing in a puddle in an open field holding a metal rod to the heavens and instead struck down two young lovers hiding under a willow. The vagaries of Timmy Lightning are manifold—so sayeth Timmy Thunder. A ploughman and his son are sundered in their parallel furrows and a dove drops limp below the limb where a vulture lurks unharmed. These are authentic yarns of split-second action. Timmy Lightning—whom Timmy Thunder might love as if he were a god—never misses his mark. His bolts could strike pinhead angels. They could kindle a solitary pine needle into conflagrations. Let us talk about the new-growth merits of fortuitous accident versus the insurance frettings of civilized sprawl. The splitting of the atom has not been as dangerous to world accord as the splitting of hairs. Some of us still believe in private property. Some of us still believe in the lilies of the field. Some of us keep wind-up lightning globes on our nightstands and the thunder is our pounding hearts.

If one were to descend into my glen quite away from my castle, I

might be found herding my sheep to pasture, to the greener folds of my vale, my ardent dogs assisting. The sheep provide fresh wool for my bed and my winter clothing and my gullible eyes, and the dogs are faithful company in my solitude. One ought to bring them treats in one's pockets along with one's suspension of disbelief. My beast is docile toward all wonderers and the wondrous, and Timmy Thunder bellows with longer-lasting resonance for those who choose to believe. To my sheep I'm shepherd. To my dogs I'm master. To Timothy I'm friend. And to my beast—bound to me by the possessive—I'm manifestation.

In my snuggery, in the very deeps of my nights, when alone, when one hasn't come visiting, while my beast dozed near the bottom of its bottomless pit, I've sought God. Not any God I've heard tell of and not a God of only mountaintops, but a God of every snuggery and every bottomless pit. Or perhaps no God at all, but the imaginary one of my navel. I burrow under my wool and burlap and corduroy, and in my close lanternlight I survey the strange familiarity of my hands, the weaker and the stronger, those implements of action. This one behaves as scrivener to Timothy. That one scratches the ears of my dogs. This one waves to my beast—out of my relationship with time—from a distant sheephill. That one dillys my dally.

God—if my God exists—has granted me life, a respectful living somewhere out of sight. My sheep make more sheep. I barter them—those so chosen, on rare and unpleasant trips out of my vale—for the modest needs of me and my dogs. I'm grateful to my God—if my God exists—for the two sheep and the two dogs I was given when I left my origin. If my vale ungreens into greenlessness, it will elicit a sharp edge and my succumbing breaths, or my last voyage out of this vale, or my one plunge into the endlessness of my beast's pit. Or it's possible, I suppose, that Timmy Lightning could pluck me pure from atop my spiral tower.

My dogs make more dogs. My pigeons make more pigeons. I'm

able to labor. In this way I persist. My castle keep, as if a cave, forever holds its chill. I possess sufficient blanketry, praise be to God—if my God exists. On the colder days in my glen, I wear the coat I've mended so often it's now more mend than original. If I understand the function of my cells, this is also true of me. These hands aren't the hands of my childhood and they won't be the stiff hands folded across my chest, if that be the fate of my body. My beast needs nothing but my existence.

Leave gods and beasts outside my vale when visiting. One beast—content in its pit—and our navels will do. Navels are neither bottomless nor wholly fathomable, and around them let us ink our histories and our newborn dreams. We can listen to my pigeons coo. If there are foxes or cougars in my glen, or any predators against my pigeons or sheep, my dogs will respond. If there are threats to my dogs, I'll protect them. Any risk to me alerts my beast. Nothing of this sort ever happens and we have nothing to fear but our collective will, our over-gathered energy. Timothy, my faraway friend, knows not to come expecting collaborative power, the dual architecture of breeding, that imaginal urge. All life, all matter, every insect and every plant, every bird and fish and animal, every object in my vale is sacred. That fact as belief won't save any of us and none of us need saving.

If one were to wish to stride in my shoes—if one wanted otherness as self—one need only ask and effort. Memory yields to imagination. There exists a carousel of mythic creatures and human-built gods one can ride to oblivion. Or the clover in my vale yet sustains a flock of company. The gentle sheep, with all their munching teeth, never breach my castle walls. My every follicle and idle thought are available to the fond traveler, to the wooing aggressor. And my lofty independent bells are joyful every dawn. Show me scars of wandering. Poke me with thorns of experience. Humor me with the laughter of the fallen-hearted, the gracious lost. Press the advantage as one of the wider world. Toes stay warm in the confines of my nook, in the



creator-friendly territory of my inclinations. O—my way, toward me and mine—incline.

Story grips my vale as sunken winter. I do this. That will become of me. Happened! Desire, obstacle, despair, epiphany, fulfillment, resolution—the narrative freeze. Tell me I'm of worth. Situate me in time and space. Share my steam. From atop the spiral tower we observe ourself. The more we know the more we want to admit. Or the admittance discovers revisionist telling. Or we feel the vertigo of the eternal twist. Some of us chase some of us over cliffs. Some of us drown some of us as swine in the sea. Some of us viceroy into monarch. In the middle of our life—if this is the middle of our life—some of us come to ourselves in a dark wood and some of us get blueblitzbolted from our mounts and some of us stew in indignation on dung hills. We story ourself as ships in bottles. We catharsis ourself into snowglobes. We diorama our ways of being. Each of us does something no one else has ever done before or will ever do again. Then we perish from this earth.

Before either of our perishing, a friend might visit me—my Timothy, arm in arm with his Timothea, their eyes afire with travel. It will be springtime in my glen, less verdant than springs past but still unwintered. Among my surrounding peaks and across my rugged heath, snow would still blanket the land, but at this castled end of my vale plants will be in newest blossom. Timothy and Timothea will come a-striding. They'll clap my sheep out of their path. They'll have remembered to bring sweetmeats for my dogs. My beast will stay out of sight and the day will be a beauty. I'll take them up behind my castle to watch my tarn thaw.

They could stay, say, a day for every one of my dogs or a day for every one of my sheep. They could stay a day for every one of the stairs of my spiral tower or a day for every star in the endless night skies above my vale. They could stay until I made them autumn sweaters. Or, they could stay until they brought a child into the world,

conceived in my nook on a spring day as I tended my sheep on some distant hill of my glen. Perhaps it would be a special child born under a special winter star. And they could leave the child with me when they went traveling and I could raise it. I could be Mother Timothy. I could be the other Father Timothy. Unless my beast objected. If they do come—Timothy and Timothea—I won't take them to my spiral tower. That height I'll keep secret for the child or someone else. It's the only place in my vale out of the protective reach of my beast.

Timothy and Timothea, in my candlelit nook, love to hear Timmy Thunder tell of Timmy Lightning, those tales of motion and purpose, the aftermath's faith in the event. The effect gives praise to the cause and the world participates. Timmy Thunder speaks of blades of grass and galvanized sand and lone evergreens on ridgetops and the occasional fool trying to leave by lightning. Thou shalt tempt fate—so sayeth Timmy Thunder. Timmy Lightning neither reluctantly nor gleefully strikes his targets. The energy path is as natural as our breathing. We will drift off to sleep into snoring and dreaming whilst Timmy Thunder tells—thus he told and will tell and tells and tells.

One trip out of the vale long ago I bartered a lamb for two pigeons. I bred them sweetly. Timothy—as the distant friend—did likewise with two pigeons at his briny forest's-edge bungalow by the sea. Then—as newly devoted penpals—we swapped all of our homing birds, and thus began our airy call and response, our friendship of wing-borne language above the landscapes of other lives, other living, all of us and ours.

When they, Timothy and Timothea, leave—if they come—I'll give Timothea a pigeon of her own so she can inquire after the health and welfare of her child, of *their* child—if child there be. I can also imagine Timothy telling me that a vale with a bottomless pit is no place for a chip off his block or a petal from Timothea's bloom. I might stare at him and shrug my shoulders and grin and say I've heard children nowadays know their way around holes in the ground.

I might just shrug at him as if I weren't his best friend in this whole harmed world.

Tragedies are simply stories with such endings. Timmy Lightning strikes down a pregnant widow. Same with romances. Timmy Thunder falls for his echo. Histories are comic if given enough perspective and comedies are funnier in shared hindsight. I vanquish fear with solitude. My snuggerly holds the charms of friendly isolation and my moat holds nothing but circling water.

On sundry golden mornings I sit on the berm around my beast's bottomless pit and read sermons aloud from a book of great ecumenical wonders Timothy gave me when we were boys—sermons of divine mystery and splendid uncertainty—the language of timeless faith. Faith is seen by some as believing in something one can't know. I've never seen nor heard my beast. I've smelt its pit. Or I should say I've felt its existence in its pit. I've waved from afar to the idea of my beast, when I've imagined its gaze. One of my favorite sermons is about the distinction between disciplined devotion and devoted discipline—a differentiation, I believe, innate to my beast. Out loud, in the air of my vale, it is confirmation—to it and to me—of our entwinement. A binary sermon of folded love, creator to created, creature to creation.

Timmy Thunder comes to me in a dream to tell me of lightning moths, those like Timothea who are drawn to the momentary flash. He says this in a rumbling voice and I dream I wake to laughter—that of my dogs, turned to jackals in my sandy realm. A desert storm ravages my oasis. My tent collapses and I feel choked by dusty wings. I awake in my pile of self. I take a lantern and hike to the edge of my glen and ascend my spiral tower. There, under the sparkling firmament, I survey the human swirl. None shall sleep and none shall wake and none shall faith themselves into certainty.

We are sunflowers in the dark, our heads drooping, aware of ourself but not erect to lesser stars, our half of the earth having turned

its back upon its sun. We would be golden unto our God—if God there be—our cheerful thoughts wide to the sky—but we don't believe in the night. Some of us frenzy in the deeper darkneses as if shaken by a passing beast. We are rooted in soil and won't flee. Some of us remember pigeons as doves and some of us remember sheep as goats and some of us snuggle against our walls in the royal we. Some of us shiver in the tall exposure of our twisted towers above our subjunctive solitary sleep.

Bathe me in the waters of my snowmelt and collected tears, warmed in cauldrons over burning wood from my forest, from lightning-struck trees, poured into a granite basin outside my castle keep. *Timendi causa est nescire*. Bathe me with authorial affection, toes to crown—every smidgen of skin, every bottomless pore, every countable strand of hair. *Tempus edax rerum*. Scrub me with eye-popping vigor. *Tamquam alter idem*. Cleanse me with tender thoroughness. If one were to adore my every knob and glen, the conduits of my corduroy, the terrain of my burlap, the scratch of my wool—if one were to crave my spiral heights and my nested depths—if one were to applaud my sheep and sweetmeat my dogs and coo my pigeons to wing—if one were to overlook the ungreening of my vale and accept me as worthy of pilgrimage—if one were to seek my soul—one must be available for my death. Everything living dies. Everything erect slackens. All perception accumulates. Be my blood's beasted witness.

If I have say, my heart must rest in my vale, my mind must live in my language, my spirit must fly the all, and my soul is my maker's to shape and preserve. The imagination invents itself. Timmy Thunder comes round with his manly growl telling of Tammy Lightning, his flashy new mistress. I reject this caprice and forbid thunder and all sky-zigging and sky-zagging throughout my vale for three seasons, summering it into a known cycle. I won't be a victim of creative whim. Sperm into egg must be destiny, not accident—the fortune of luck in an instant of God. Lest one suppose, there can't be the death of death—unless as symbol, as semantic wonder. I won't outlive my

words. They won't outlive my vale. My God—if my God exists—can't outlive my soul, since soul is eternal—if soul there be. Bathe my body, my very parts, one by one, and the whole as recognizable whole—gladden my heart, temporal my brain, watch my spirit cut the sky. Warm waters, inside and out, crimson and clear, viscous and necessary. Vital air, inside and out, collaborative motion, the breath of loving. Scour my knowledge of anyone else, of everyone but us and ours.

Here we are, be it known—one of us isolates oneself in make-believe, in storious days of doings and doer, pulse and desire, companionless stretches of dimensional living and endless one-lust. We reject the seed of the family tree. O the iterations of imagined life. One of us sublimates oneself to heritage faith. Psalmic splendor. Ecclesiastical sobriety. Solomon's yodel. Quartet harmony. Summer comes. Timmy Thunder rumbles on about Tammy Lightning and her vibrant spark, her unique aim, her bolty gams—Timmy Lightning is but a fond memory of boyhood, of younger talk, a friend now elsewhere in the world. I send Timothy a little scroll of private blessing, of self-graffiti. I ask him to come visit from his coastal horizon, from his salty hunker, and to bring that tall white sail of a Timothea, if he wishes. He could, I suggest—scrawling my words in a hasty postscript—seek a fresh progress within her—he could go a-fathering. His doing could awaken a sunny day in my vale.

Once upon a time, when the world was a system, when the beginning was a word of creation and the ending was revelations of resolve, I abandoned my vale for the joys of wandering—I wrapped the earth with the twine of my meanders. This, and now that, a wayward path. I met myself at every crossroads, the way one can't shake a stray jackal after one has scratched its ears. I drifted around cities of tin through wastes of weeds and sheddings. I trod the washes of dead rivers and I rolled in the clover of baby lands. I floated above black forests beyond white factories and I slept beside glimmering

seas. I shared an apple with a grim harvester in the orchard of his beast. I whistled half-melodies now fully lost to memory. All of this—an adventure of a lifetime—a young man's impulse—out honoring God—if his God existed. Now I'll speak of the day I came upon a graveyard in a murky hollow. Tender piles of earth with only rough crosses and a willow for company.

Once upon a time, when Timothy was a-traveling, he came upon a cemetery in an ungreening glen. A solitary grave with only a wooden marker and a wan willow for company. One can dig one's own pit. One can manage to die in one's pit. One will find it difficult to fill the hole with dirt and plant one's marker in the mound after one lies dead in one's pit. One must have a companion or rely upon wind and time or some clever apparatus of one's imagination. When Timothy saw the lonely mound he understood it was one of self-burial. *In actu oculi—perditio tua ex te.* This place was an act of autonomy.

Story blows into one's life like sawdust. Just when one is about to sink one's roots into the soil of one's soul, someone comes along visiting and one must give a tour of one's fortress and environs and spread some cheer. Bring smiles of willow sweetness—gaze upon my vale with sorrowed hope—touch my sleeve as if I were disappearing. The narrative of my life won't be a zenith spiral or a self-wound coil or a birth to earth passion skit. Lightning never surprises the trees it strikes.

I've known happiness, or what I thought was happiness—what I think of as happiness—what feels like it must have been happiness. And I've known its lack. The flux between the two is the beating of any heart. Tammy Lightning runs off with Tommy Thunder and sadness soaks my snuggery. The willow beside my moat droops into the rising water. My sheep weep and my pigeons sob and my dogs howl, all while my beast corners silence. Timmy Thunder is nothing but the sound of dislodged shale sliding down a steep slope of my vale. Timothy is nothing but scrawl on a diminutive scroll flown across distances between selves. I'm

nothing but the thought-residue of a man with limited skills. But I've known happiness and I know its lack.

Once upon a time, when I was young and old, when I was between and outside, I sat with my twilight God at the edge of my bottomless pit and we spoke lightly of meaning and meaninglessness and love. God—if God it were—said nary a word. I spoke with some nervousness and some confidence, asked precocious questions and answered them modestly, sighed when sighing was true and let the quiet swell to accentuate the beauty of the evening. We sat as companions in this life—a timeless match. I spoke of Timothy and his grassroot goodness and of Timothea, his summer wind. I dangled my legs over the dark. I asked God what God thought of me and I sat and endured the silence and cracked my knuckles and watched the stars roll by. I wanted to touch shoulders but I was too shy. The night wore on. I puffed out my chest and declared that time was no enemy of mine. Then, before I had a moment to gasp, the horizon was upon us.

So Timothy—amidst his story—sat beside the fresh mound and wept. Tears gave way to reflection and he doodled in the dirt, drawing labyrinths of elsewheres. He laughed at his weeping, and the laughter gave way to a wry smile and thoughts of all of us and ours, and Timothy looked around the scrub for traces of God as burier. What he found was evidence of a system, a world of properties and laws and anomalies. Order infused with mischievous glee. Unstoppable cycles. Predictable trends. Compression beyond his insight to unpack. This was, he discerned, a place of passage, nothing more—he ate his ploughman's lunch from his satchel and gulped water from his flask and went nexting, the only way to go.

After one of my wintergone baths, my skin still steaming, while I'm newly wrapped in wool at my table in my evercold castle keep, a pigeon arrives from Timothy with a scroll about his desire to go to sea, to sail a galleon of pride into peril, to leave humility under his



bungalow pillow and seek doldrums in the vast ocean, a dead spot of reckoning with his God—as God there be. I crawl under the piles of my snuggery and spirit myself to the desert, where I linger at an oasis and peruse scriptures of self-belief by candlelight.

What I most want to say that I haven't said, what I most want known about me and my vale, about lightning and thunder and my tarn and my beast, is that I kept them pristine for all to enjoy, not as park or museum, but as angle of sight. If one tilts one's head and muses, one might glimpse my spiral tower among my peaks, even if one is landlocked in some heartland. This is a human gift, this imaginative gaze. One could parent a place—as one parents a child. One could steward a place even if one weren't its creator—as one might steward another's child. We god ourselves. We beast ourselves. We do. We god and beast ourself. One can be an infinite self or one can be an eternal self. I create this choice. The eternal here and the infinite now have been discontinued. I flirt with my beast by wandering out of the moment. I praise my God by lingering in the flow. Then, one bright day, deep within my snuggery, I'll oblivate. I won't be gone forever. One can't orphan one's God—if God there be.

From atop my spiral tower—scraggly lightning along the gone horizon, thunder out of earshot—I'll point, as promise vane, as directional bystander, toward faith. Follow possibility, not likelihood. Believe in the uncertainty of mortal sentiment. I could spin my arrow for millennia and not weary of result. The familiar joy of predictive surprise. Some of us are bored by boredom and some of us are bored by human drama and some of us are bored by such discernment, by the components of language in our built world. Some of us fear faith and some of us fear faithlessness. Some of us place our faith in faithlessness. We toggle between confidence in ourself and deference to higher powers. We are vibrating beings. Our fluttering eyes. Our binary hearts.

We recline into our remembrance. We twist into our projection.

We busy ourself with duties and chores and habits and diversions. We dread change and we rely upon change. We bury ourself under duty and choice and habit and urge. Some of us hear freedom chime from our spines and some of us wrap our spines around our ankles in a binding mercy. Some of us step out front for a swallow under the stars and drown in streetlight glow. Some of us step out back for a moment in the dark and are illuminated by a falling star. We pass through our nights in comfortable misery and stunning bliss, prone to evolutionary withdrawal. We accordion our wants into needs, and whistle ourself into good moods. Our spindly legs do our little lightning jig.

Some of us still consider ourself capable and competent and compassionate and kind. Some of us still think we have control over our consciousness. We are reasonable creatures with specific and pliable minds. We are adaptive and stratified and corrosive and kind. We are ants and cavemen striving to progress. We are individual ingredients in a magnificent stew. We are ash in mother earth's lungs.

Once upon a time, in the far away and the long ago, within the ancestral origin, before we slew our gods with thoughtful indifference, before our adoption of factual standards, I went adrift in the dark wood seeking my shoulder to shoulder companion. I found—or dreamt I found—my dust-to-dust self, my anti-saviour, my lily soul. Then I sat in a meadow and formed birds out of mud. I taught them my language and sent them on errands to kismet strangers in their lonely nests, to kindred them out of sleep. I feathered them with my paradise. I put eggs in their potential. I let them see me from high above my new wanderings, the birds as strangers and the strangers as birds. Angels of unmiraculous meld. This isn't fable or cautionary tale or vignette. This is diminished thunder.

This is tummy rumble. I'm hungry in my snuggerly before breakfast. I stare at the scratched dome of my castle keep. Those are the marks of a monologue. There exist no pigeons to transport the scars of a ceiling. To gain my heart one must strike my belltower, if

only one bolt for one chime. Bring sugar for my gruel. Bring ripe citrus. Be brazen. Come with sleeves rolled.

My words are shaped like thorns, to encourage bleeding; patina blanching, crown to toe, to the pale. Language leaks as plasma into my landscape. When the spiral tower is drained to anemia, come with me to my nook within my fortress. Let us peer into one another's eyes to witness all of us and ours.

Timothy sends word by pigeon that Timothea is coming to visit my vale without him. She'll bring her white hair trailing behind her as a surrender shroud. My beast will allow her access. My sheep will clear her path. My dogs will lick her fingers. She'll penetrate my outer wall via sheer will and will crawl into my cozy still wet from my moat. She'll wish to speak of Timothy, of his bear's chest and his bear-breath and his ursa sheen. I'll hold her as one holds a cloud. She'll snow on my chest. She'll whisper of unborn children and the wintering of my life. She'll ask about my spiral tower and I'll keep it tucked out of sight. She'll fall asleep breathing warmth upon my adam's apple.

Now comes my candid soliloquy, my canned speech, my clawing of the dome, my self-vandalism. Listen at rest or apace or in fetal clench. Attend even if cowering or dozing or agitated. If I stretch the truth beyond its elasticity, may Timmy Lightning sunder my strong hand from my weak, my port ribs from starboard. The half-sphere of my castle keep is as striated as the morning firmament above my vale. From my bed or my parapets I'll tell the story of perspective, of testament. I'm born into the divinity of the actual, as is everything. I'm born into being as logos, the absolute word on my slate, that spray of epitaph. I'm the sole Timothy of my realm, the alpha and omega male, my beast's one array. My future will make my past jealous even though my death won't make the tiniest splash in my tarn. I won't be lionized or canonized or idolized or victimized or sanitized. My particular mediocrity assures my lasting privacy. I won't be deified or martyred by anyone but myself, and my will shall be tempered deep

in my snugery. I was lonely and I'll be unlonely. My vale contains my beast and my beast contains my dreams well dreamt.

As if they were tin soldiers, I play with them in my nook—Timmy Lightning and Timmy Thunder, and those assorted Tammys and Tommys. They're heroes and antagonists, pawns and cameos. They strike and boom—spotlight and timpani, strobe and sheetmetal, lantern jiggle and mouth noise. Timmy Lightning—the powerful mute—strikes my friend and lifts him from his shoes and lays him down on the dewy ground. Timmy Thunder—the blustery spokesman—rushes across my landscape to tell me the sad news. I rend my clothes and gnash my teeth and pull my hair and am shredded by the sharpening tragedy. I blame the messenger. I blame the messenger's god. I burnish a Tammy in the lantern flame. I crimp a Tommy till he snaps. I weep and tantrum. This is the delight of a man gone to child, of child as god. My imagination spurs me to vengeance and salvation.

If Timothy someday comes to visit, fresh from hibernation and thrust into the light by the odor of buddings—with or without Timothea—if he comes, my better seeker, to accuse me of betrayal or apostasy or chagrin—if he comes, my reciprocator, to praise me for ascetic style, for nimble simplicity, I'll smile upon him with boyish glee. In my nook, on a shelf beside my work table, I keep three black boxes—in case we die, in case we don't die and in case we never know—and in them I keep the scrolls Timothy sends by pigeon, words of admonishment and apology and avoidance. When Timothy comes I'll drop the boxes into my beast's bottomless pit and confetti its darkness.

Now comes the day I found one of my sheep dead and torn apart on a streamside slope of my glen, when my heart thundered as I thought my beast had at last grown hungry. My dogs fear nothing—except my beast—and they would have thrown themselves at any common predator, even if outnumbered. I lay down my sword

and shield, transfixed by the sheep's missing heart, transfigured by the bloodshed. If my beast ever wants my heart, too, it shall have it—I'll drop my weary shell as one might drop one's woolen coat in a fireside room. The sheep's life wasn't lost in its willingness to sacrifice itself. That's what throbs my beast. That's the energy in any storm system, any out-of-a-clear-blue sky, any nightstand globe fakery or imaginative flash. It strikes me as possible—although I might never know—that it was I who slew my sheep in a righteous night wandering and I who forgot come morning light. There isn't blood on my hands but there was blood in the stream running out of my vale.

When one of my dogs suffers a natural death, I heave it into my beast's bottomless pit. Not as a gift to my beast, whom I don't believe needs to eat, but to my dog—a way of overcoming its fear in the end, a perpetual plunge into risen faith. I say some encouraging words—I scratch behind its ears one last time—I shed a tear upon its dry nose and send it into confidence. Then I slip gratefully back to the pack with their damp dog noses, the loyal living. If I should perish in my slumber or collapse on a stroll across my heather, the dogs that survive me will drag me to the pit's edge, whimper and bark, nuzzle my neck and nudge me into obscurity and freefall. I can't know what will become of them after I'm gone. I don't know where they will go after I'm gone. They would want to watch over the sheep and keep them safe, but they would grow hungry. The sheep could graze this vale for days unto seasons, even as it browns, but couldn't be sustained forever. The dogs would have to go scrounging. The pigeons in their castle enclosure—O my—I can't think what will become of them after I'm gone. I must think of what ought to be done with them before I'm gone. I could surprise Timothy with a barrage of scrolls, an extravaganza of my language from the sky. The ungreening of my glen is underway. My mortality leaks from my seams.

Comedies are sweet mishaps in time. Timmy Lightning's divine bolt impregnates the beauty pageant queen. Same with farces. Timmy

Thunder discovers independent volition. History is fluff in the wider vista and tragedies are sadder when suffered alone. I validate love with witness. My spiral tower holds the charms of friendly persuasion and my mind holds nothing but graying matter.

When I read my favorite sermons to my beast—especially the one about discipline and devotion, and their courtship and marriage and divorce and reconciliation—my voice might carry to my spiral tower. If I were to swear my devotion to my vale, to emphasize myself as devotee, I might neglect to appreciate the hard work it has taken to thrive. If I were to speak only of the grindstone and the straightish narrowing way, I might fail to value the ardency of my steadfast heart. When only one modifies the other, there is imbalance. They must modify one another equally to coincide, to create the charge. My beast listens, I imagine, and the pit darkens, that beautiful blackening, the core of a lightningless storm. If I were to believe that if I were equipped with a shovel and enough time I could fill the beast's pit with the soil of this world, I would make of myself an imaginative cripple.

Timmy Thunder comes to me in a dream to tell me of his god, his creator, an instance of energy. I'm in my oasis tent devouring the theorems and scriptures of travelers, and he says the wind is bringing a sandstorm to bury me and my waterhole and my palm trees. If one is to survive, one will need to procure a miracle—so sayeth Timmy Thunder. I insist I don't believe in miracles or mistakes. Let the sky of sand bury me—I'll breathe air from between the grains of sand and wait for a newer wind. A miracle—so sayeth Timmy Thunder—to survive being buried alive. An economy of desire, I say. I would only want what I have and whatever I'm about to have. I want exactly what I'm given in this life until I'm given death and for an instant I'll want that and then I'll stop wanting altogether—except that I might still wish for a visitor and a friend and an escape surprise and something to tend and a sincere subject and a potent verb and a dearest object and

the ability to articulate and a better reason not to be than to be.

My beast's flannel pouch and its specificity exist for my travel moment, my tumble out. I beg a visit whilst I lack a farewell. I diagram my wrinkles in my snuggery and I map my choices from atop my spiral tower. I daydream under my willow beside my moat. I wait for Timothy or another. I feel a chill. I watch my tarn freeze. I slept in my mended coat tonight. God hath quickened us. O will I wake.

One summer Timothea visited the vale and found it abandoned. The dales and hills were sheepless. The moat was dry and the willow was a stump. The castle keep was cluttered with dog play. The snugery was unsnugged. She hiked to the tarn—the clear body of water still healthy with snowmelt. She peered into the highlands for signs of a shepherd and his herd. She surveyed the sharp mountains and the browning glen. She spied the spiral tower. She spied the bottomless pit. Her Timothy's Timothy was nowhere to be hugged or to have his hair mussed. So she rolled her sleeves and hitched her trousers and set her sights on obtaining the pinnacle of the tower with its unique vista.

Timothea was neither goddess nor princess but she imagined herself thus as she strode the heather. The vale was flowered again in her thoughts. She greened it from memory into the moment. Her white hair waved like a beloved jack on a mast. She stopped when she reached the mountain swale and ate a hunk of bread and an apple from her satchel and she gulped water from her flask. The god in her stepped out of her heart into the wilderness air. It's one thing to create the natural world and it's another to be a creature with eyes and skin and lungs on a gorgeous day. Timothea flashed a smile as if she were keeping a secret from herself and then bounded up the ridge toward the spiral reach.

She imagined knights with sparklers in their quivers wanting to fireworks her into joy. She imagined a god who could spray the whole Milky Way and leave a star in her belly. She conjured a queen who



wished to mentor her in the ways of gracious rule and king control. The tower kiltered strangely. It was more organic growth than built structure—tree-like and twisted with the spiral stairway cut into its flesh. It made her dizzy to stare at the clouds rushing by its crown. She swallowed her fret and ascended. As soon as she had negotiated the initial twist she heard mad barking from below. Jackals—she thought—or dogs. She squinted down. She recognized two or three of them but she had no sweetmeats. She clucked. She cooed. They were unappeasable. She shrugged and told herself she would deal with them upon her descent. So around and up! she went—up and around and up until she stood upon a widow’s walk above the world, above all of us and ours.

Here she was, be it known—she gazed across the vast effort as people clambered and groveled and strutted and struggled and swore. They clucked and cooed and scowled and growled and drooled. They ate and lacked and smacked and slept and worked and dreamt and died. Good gracious—someone ought to structure this chaos. Yet it was oddly captivating. Pattern. Distribution. Randomness. Destiny. Paradox. Timothea’s heart thundered in her chest. Glancing back into the vale she could see the bottomless pit but somehow felt it couldn’t see her. She looked for a flock and a Timothy but saw neither. So hours and hours passed while Timothea—enthralled and appalled—observed the human condition, the living swirl. While she watched, twilight snuck into the vale. Time can be stopped—but not really.

Timothea knew she should leave the tower before dark and make her way back to the castle keep by moonlight, but portions of the world were steadily revolving into light and she wished to partake of the fresh mornings. The moon would be over the vale for much of the night yet. Eventually, however—as might be guessed—she grew weary of body and bleary of eyes. She felt exhausted and for a moment believed she’d been third personed, that she wasn’t in control and could assert no fundamental I or royal we. She curled up on the

flesh of the tower and dozed. A trap door opened under her and she fell. She fell the entire length of the tower and beyond, as if down a well, and she woke believing she was somehow in the bottomless pit, or that this vision was connected to the bottomless pit, and that she would now fall for eternity. But nobody falls forever—not really.

Timothea awoke in a round room. In one half of the room she was riding a carousel at the beach and in one half she was walking around a pit arguing with a beast. This split was observable. She was striding and gesticulating in severe discourse with the unseen beast and then suddenly she was astride a griffin bobbing along. The nearby surf was moonlit and her Timothy went up and down next to her on a white rhino and they were flirting. And then the beast was admonishing her in a voice not unlike Timothy's as she paced incessantly around the pit—sensory overload—subjectively excruciating after the objectivity of the tower. Timothea didn't believe in some strange magic of the tower, but she did believe in the potency of her imagination. Still, she couldn't wake herself or stop the carousel or silence the beast.

This is the confusion of selves, of perceptive time. We I ourself into a functional whole. I'm not who I think I am. Timothea saw the breakers shine and she heard the beast quaver. She teased Timothy and she agitated the beast. She was herself and herself in my mind. And she knew she ought to put a halt to this foolishness by choosing continuity over simultaneity—but before she could choose, the round room kaleidoscoped, and for a heartbeat and a skipped heartbeat she was more than she could imagine. Then she found herself sitting at the edge of the bottomless pit with her legs dangling over the abyss as she sat on the edge of the spiral tower with her legs dangling over the knowable world. A simpler dichotomy, backing into itself.

What we get we got. What we love we loved. I'll ask Timothea to put on her cape and her bonnet and her gloves and follow me. She'll want to touch shoulders in the carriage but she'll be too timid. The boards of the coach will be sticky with aspirations. The team of a

snowy horse and a milky horse will move with the grace and flow of animal collaboration. She'll watch the blustery evening countryside go by and she'll tighten her lips. I'll dream of her flannel. Timothea sat at the edge of the void with her arms wrapped around herself to fend off the summer night's chill. She hummed melodies of the sea and her blown hair shone like ocean foam in the moonlight. I held the beast at bay.

Now comes a creator's affection for what is created. One must let it go or one will grow to hate its flaws. One must keep it in sight so that one doesn't romanticize its charms. One must make more to steer clear of the precious fetish. One must never repeat oneself—one just mustn't. Timothea, out of the blue, remembered what to call the dogs—sweet words of recognition and assembly—creature languaged to creature in the meat of the world. She didn't know what to call me. She doesn't know what to call me. This isn't memory lapse—she hasn't ever known. With scissors from her satchel she chopped off her locks and let them fall in clumps into the blackness of the pit. A mourning act for Timothy. She felt sympathy for the people amid the chaotic fray—for all of us and ours—who couldn't see her watching them. She wished to be among them again, splashing along the shore with her Timothy, or sunning herself with a girlfriend from town, or digging in the sand alongside her niece and nephew with their bright plastic shovels. She was neither suburbanite nor princess, wife nor goddess, explorer nor mother—she was a girl grown into womanhood with the imagination of a sailor.

All matter is the refraction of spirit. This is easy to accept while dangling one's legs from a spiral tower or the rim of the bottomless pit of an unseen beast. Timothea's Timothy—on a galleon out at sea, praying to his god in the midst of doldrums for a breeze—and his Timothy—missing from the beloved vale and cherishing travel scripture at an oasis beyond her reach—were born of her need for company. Company is best when fond and impermanent. Timothea

ran her hands through her cropped hair, shorn to her nephew's likeness. It was midday and summer warm and she thought she'd like a swim in the tarn. Since the pit was closer than the tower to the tarn, she relinquished her place above the known world, rose from her spot at the pit's rim, and strode toward the abandoned castle.

We could walk with her but we can't be she. We can walk in her shoes but we can't say I as if we were her consciousness. We could pretend to be the dogs, and we could bark and snarl at her until she called a couple of us by words familiar to our hearts and she scratched behind our ears and we understood we had known her at one time as if time were her friend, or at worst not her enemy. Up behind the castle lay the tarn. Timothea stripped off her clothes, did some privacy in the bushes, and dove into the water. We can't be the water and envelop her. We can't be in touch with every moment of her skin, the totality of her boundary. We imagine her into being as more than we can know. She surfaced for air. She must surface for air. She surfaces for air and we are there to recognize her as the Timothea who dove into the water we couldn't be. She was dry and now she is wet, at ease in a substance of her origin. I want her with me but it must be her choice, her future choosing out of the ever-present. She misses the feel of her wet hair on her temples and shoulders. She swims to shore and climbed out into the air, the air we couldn't be against her skin, the air we'll never be in her lungs and bloodstream—unless wished beyond verve.

Timothea stood in the sunlight and tried to shake herself dry, as dogs do. Storm clouds were building across the vale. She would stay in the castle keep tonight and leave the vale in the morning, she thought, suddenly shivering in the rising breeze. She dressed in a rush, dampening her clothes, and went down to the castle—to the cold nook where she huddled among the gathered dogs to be kept warm. Timmy Lightning soon lit the afternoon glen with surprise and Timmy Thunder came a-courting, telling tales of union and melancholy.

The powerful rain scrubbed the parapets and the ramparts, and the run-off from the hills quickly filled the moat. Timothea lay amid canine slumber. She wasn't bothered by their snores or sighs or dream tremblings or whimpers—nor was she smitten with the brilliance of the flashes nor the bravado of the thunder—but she felt unrest for the missing sheep and their absent shepherd and the willow stump. A story was occluded in her memory. So she did an inventory of her world and her Timothys and this vale and the spiral tower and the heath and the river and this glen and the bottomless pit and the tarn and the moat and this whole castle. O! The pigeons! She dashed toward their enclosure at the far ramparts. By the time she arrived she was soaked, and all seemingly for naught, as the enclosure door was ajar and the dry roosts were empty of birds. There were, however, three black boxes tucked into the straw.

We put them there ourself or we had them put there or we saw them put there—in any event, we weren't surprised Timothea found them. Most likely Timothy wanted to refresh his memory of their contents before sending his pigeons on their way with his final scrolls to Timothy, and he had negligently failed to restore them to the nook or dispose of them in the bottomless pit.

Timothea woke to freedom chimes. She had spent the night reading—with difficulty, by moonlight—her Timothy's lifelong scrolls to his Timothy, and even some affectionate postscripted hellos in her own handwriting. She'd fallen asleep in the pigeon enclosure and awoke stiff from the night's chill, although the day had the markings of a scorcher—clear skies and breezeless. Yesterday's storm had long ago moved out to sea. Timothea missed her Timothy's fervent glow and resolved to find a galleon and sail the oceans in search of him as soon as was convenient. His Timothy—the Timothy of this vale—must have gone beyond her effectment. Then—as she was about to fetch her satchel from the castle keep and, after a modest breakfast, make for the sea—she stepped on an unsent scroll, half-hidden in the

straw and inked in the local Timothy's scrawl.

What it said isn't for public consumption—even we ourself caught only the gist. It made Timothea laugh aloud and pixied her eyes—or so we testify and would like it believed. Her eyes watered—but not from sadness, or not from grief anyway. It was the laughter of a goddess or an aunt or a fond neighbor over the severe and awkward antics of a boyish spirit. Timothea wiped her eyes and tucked the scroll in her pocket and went to the nook to grab an apple and the rest of the hard bread from her satchel. She was famished and ate another apple and gulped down the last of the water in her flask—she'd visit the stream on her way out of the vale.

She hiked to the tarn and bathed and washed her clothes and hung them on tree limbs to dry and she imagined herself a bold but gentle robber of the wealthy and she fought off soldiers and dried herself by lying on a boulder in the sun. Her mouth felt foul. She rubbed a perfumed nub of soap across all of her teeth and the roof of her mouth and her tongue. As her thoughts strayed from her Timothys, she considered grasping a solitary life of her very own in this vale. The dogs had accepted her—they had even joined her as she bathed, swimming about the tarn and fetching sticks and now were exhausted and sleeping near her on the dappled rocks. The glen was ungreening, true, but it was something a weather shift and a fresh outlook would probably solve—more storms like last night's could revive the whole vale. Timothea could barter the furniture from the bungalow for some sheep and perhaps a pair of pigeons. The castle keep could be scrubbed and the snuggerly resnugged. She could be a shepherdess and roam the heather in search of four-leaf clovers. She could fashion a cozy nest for herself atop the spiral tower if she could manage to lock the trap door into place. Then she thought of the willow stump and the beast. These needed swift and nimble consideration.

We wished we could whisper in her ear and deliver a truth to her soul. I had a vision of her as a garrulous child with uncommon

hopes at her family's supper table as she spoke of saving the world. The willow stump, she thought—with lightning brilliance—could be developed into a tiny stage where she could perform for her loyal dogs, her salty liling voice wagging their tails. And she could go to the pit on sundays and fold her arms across her chest and loosen her tongue and shout down the beast with the thundering confidence of one who has traveled places. We wished we could speak into her heart the range of solitude and the clutch of love. I saw her as a youth out climbing trees and swimming with whales and marching with armies and rocketing to Andromeda and as a woman birthing a god in a sheepless haven and wanting some special someone to come visit her keep.

Timothea put on her dry clean clothes and shouldered her satchel and stood staring down at the castle and across the waning vale. The spiral tower gleamed in the far distance, beckoning, beckoning. The bottomless pit was a black hole absorbing her horizons and greenest events. The castle was masterless. The sky was cloudless. Heaven is sheepless and Hell is goatless and the good Earth isn't and never was timeless. Time to go, she thought. She thought: I want to stay. There, of a sudden, was that elusive I come visiting, one's private noun, a lurking beast in one's breast.

Once upon a time in the fullest always, in the plural wash—before the birth of the singular and the ploy of coordinates—primes swam with zero in the original tarn. Then then became more than then and everything changed. This was the motion of light through the now into the next, the speed of suggestion. Nature imagined itself out of the void. Bottomless pits aren't also topless—even if they're lidless. Spiral towers can't twist endlessly upward, only inward. The verdant pales. Minds get struck by lightning. The valed body burns.

A curl of smoke rose from the far end of the glen. A smoldering tree from last night's storm—a shepherd's campfire—spontaneous divine combustion. Timothea knew of possibility. She made her way

toward the smoke, wishing she could fly. When she arrived at her guess of the locale, there was no fire and no smoke and no evidence of either. Perplexing. Since she was near the stream, she went to its bank and stooped and filled her flask. Perhaps—one might reasonably think—if there were truly a fire, she could spy it from atop the spiral tower. Thus again she strode the heath toward the zenith, catching her breath at the swale, scanning the vale to no avail, reaching the foundation of the tower. A jagged black scar marred its alabaster, running up the shaft toward the crown, as if scorched by lightning. Peering into the glen, Timothea suffered the sensation that it was snowing down in the pit and the beast was in a shiver. She stood in flux, wrapped in her body.

Ambivalence is more both than neither. Timothea climbed the stairway toward panorama and she rushed back into the glen toward philanthropy. She wished to watch the world unfold. She wished to provide a beast with warmth. We are more than the sum of our parts and we are more than the whole of ourselves. We free ourselves within resonant chords. Timothea observed the machinations and adjustments and anomalies of the human soul across time. She witnessed foibles and courage and common malaise. Civilizations rise and fall as toddlers struggle to learn to walk. Love is corrupt as possession. Ideas propagate. Timothea, with dry moss and flint from her satchel, lit her Timothy's scrolls one by one and flung them into the pit—cities burning in the night, galleons aflame at sea. The swirling ash resembled snow.

Miracles are imaginative faith willed into being. They arise beyond the ken of the club and the congregation and the crowd. They register in the heart, not the mind, and the truer substance of them stain our genome, not cathedral glass. Timothea lay beside Timothy in the forested bungalow by the sea. He slept. She listened to his breathing and the surf and the wind in the evergreens. Earlier—in bearish desire and dolphin whimsy, in dolphin lust and bearish mirth—they'd



conceived. Timothea didn't know this fact and Timothy didn't know this fact. We know it only within created time, and if I were to try to tell them it would only manifest as inkling. Timothea breached the castle's outer wall, swam the moat, crept into the snugery and, still wet, held her Timothy's Timothy in his leaving. The heaped blankets were of burlap and corduroy and homemade wool. Still he shivered. She told him of their Timothy's plans to sail to his god—if his god existed—and request reconciliation, a prayer of acknowledgement. She hearthed his Timothy's wintry solitude as Timothy eased off to his oasis under a different firmament. From atop the spiral tower she dissembled them.

Romances are gravel in the belly. Timmy Lightning shatters the stone marker at the grave. Same with histories. Timmy Thunder spreads the sure news. Stories are communicable through air or blood, and belief is pernicious. I value thought with company. My bottomless pit holds the charms of friendly revision and my fate holds nothing but my creator.

Timothea held the final scroll—the unsent scroll from the vale's Timothy to the bungalow's Timothy—not knowing whether she should light it afire and deliver to the beast. Her Timothys had kept in touch with the discipline of migratory creatures, the devotion of birds on nests. One was the life and one was the living and the other was the living and the other was the life. A symbiotic chain. Timothea—striking the flint and coaxing the spark to flame in the moss and lighting the scroll and watching it ignite as she dropped it into the pit—felt as if she were alive.

Timmy Thunder went to Timothea in a dream—back in her girlhood—to tell her about her role in the pageant. She was to be a dimensional hinge, a triangular threshold, a cyclical conduit. Hers was the duty of deliverance. She understood none of this upon waking into her bed and home of safety and condition, and she touched her knees together to reassure herself of the gift of freewill. She'd slept

restlessly that night, distressed by the passing storms and the rumbling god-voice, by the span of her life around the warm bend.

Now, in the focus of this telling, as she stood atop the tower and beside the bottomless pit, in herself and out of herself, ordinary and unique, arriving and gone, Timothea imagined a planet where the inhabitants launched their dead to its only moon, the orb bright in the heavens for all to see, a nightly reminder of mortal time, of loss and absence and the privilege of shared experience, a reflective pall lit by the providing sun, the romance of death and the residue of a planet's creatures scattered across the subordinate sphere, the lifeless gazing down upon the yet living. Timothea felt the god within her revolve.

Doldrums of the gods, our still waters—I eat an orange as if it were the last orange in existence. A gratitude act of grand living. I’ve sailed for three days to find this triangle of ocean where winds are banished and unoccasional breezes aren’t tolerated. I’ve come to satisfy my curiosity and to sear my heart under my God’s gaze. I’ve composed a prayer—of human genesis—and committed it to memory. Tomorrow I’ll stand upon the galleon’s prow and speak it to sky and sea. Then my God—if I’m worthy—will guide me where I need to go and show me what I must do. If I’m not worthy, I’ll go down with the ship—this ship I’ll sink myself. That’s an equation I understand. None of those negotiations of domestic math. If I’m loved, I’ll follow my God into any hurricane, any tsunami, any maelstrom, and I’ll withstand the fury. If I’m not loved, I’ll perish in the swallowing deep. I’ve shaken hands in agreement with the idea of my God.

My hands are burnt by rope and my eyes are burnt by sunlight and my future is smoky with martyrdom. I’ll die for ultimate truth if I ever find any. Watch me stare down doubt in these lullings. My sails are limp. The ocean is glass now, horizon to horizon, and my faithful galleon is stalled, adrift upon this calm above the terrors of our inverse heavens, the liquid sky. I hear my ship’s wood relax in anchorless languor. The day is beyond afternoon but shy of twilight, and I long for the violet gloaming, the relenting of evening unto night, when my thoughts will coil with me in anticipation of dawn and the delivery of my devout prayer. Neither cloud nor star has yet shown itself to keep me company. I should have brought pigeons and scrolls to send

word of my pilgrimage to Timothy. I should have brought a parrot to squawk philosophy or prattle pirate with me. I should have brought Timothea and her sanctioned actions of the collective spirit. All alone am I in the middle of my created time, alone with all of us and ours.

Here I am, be it known—the only condition more underrated than solitude is abiding with one’s love. If that is one’s mother from childhood, let it be so, and revel in one’s memories. If it is one’s lover—lucky stars! If it is to be one’s God, one has chosen a lonely version of dismay. I’m myself, out at sea, gazing and pondering and welling up with affection for the day as it succumbs to its evolution. The orange was delicious. A simple truth. I peel another—and in so peeling acknowledge my place in nature. I must eat. I must hydrate. My thumbs work. I consider the people I’ve known: Timothy—Timothea—the gentleman with whom I swapped my father’s old crown for this galleon. There are others, I assume, whom I’ve forgotten, and whom I could gather around me into an imaginative we so that I could say things like “we are creatures of habit” or “we are more afraid of the unknown than the known” or “we are sunflowers in the dark”—or even “we are all alone in the midst of creating ourself.” The people of my life might applaud my prayer to destiny—if they were present, if what I came to do could be done in company. It would be foolish, they might say, to believe in a particular maker—but belief in belief is admirable. Thus one can’t have one’s people with one always.

After nightfall and before sleep, I spy the pinpricked glow of ship lanterns far off my starboard gaze. They’re in motion, so they must be skirting along the perimeter of the doldrums on a fresh wind, or they possess an engine, or they whip their slaves for the sake of speed. I sit in the moonless dark, my sails rolled, my lanterns snuffed, afraid for the welfare of my galleon—I couldn’t protect her from marauders, not by myself, not without divine intervention. If I could only we them and all of their ilk, my fears would be allayed. Even if I could we

everyone, I wouldn't sacrifice my autonomy. A shooting star gleams across the waters. Our firmament is coming loose.

I climb my mainmast to peer everywhere I'm able—into the sphere of space and across the plane of sea and throughout my time as an imaginary soul. This self-reflection in the creative open stuns existence, sparks existence. My mind is a lantern I'd blow out if I thought it could be glimpsed across the waters. It was lightning struck and shocked and there rose a flicker and now it'll smolder till the day I go dark. I think of Timothy in his vale I'll someday visit, of our attempts at friendship via our tightly rolled scrolls—his graphed and colorful, mine white under black scratch—our reliance upon the small trustworthy hearts of pigeons. Timothy's glen—I gather from his elusive scribbles—is the residue of a god's dream, a daydream spun in the shade of a mortal willow. My galleon is the concentrated notion of a boyish aesthete—her cabin furnishings are more velour than velvet, her dormant cannon stuffed with felt, her riggings long ago stolen from the circus—but in her hold she carries sealed crates of nuts and fruits and barrels of the freshest water available from the bustling port not far from my forest bungalow. If my God wishes me to sail the imaginative seas to the mysterious grottoes of lost continents, I'm equipped for a long voyage—as long as I don't encounter the ill-willed, or as long as diplomacy is successful.

In my dark aerie I hang suspended, a dome of stars for companionship. It's neither comforting nor disconcerting to know that there are more suns in the universe than human souls on this planet. If given time—I could count beyond them—even if I only count primes. I think of Timothea on her way to surprise Timothy, her hair a wispy cloud against the alpine sky. In her hold she could carry a new world. I'm stymied by the concept of Timothy's bottomless pit. Even the blackest primordial trench below me is bedded with silt and the debris of seahorses and leviathans. I think of the gentleman wearing my father's old crown to bed and fantasting himself a shepherd of

weaker kingdoms. I think about people in trains and cars and ships and trucks and airplanes scurrying and buzzing around the globe. I think about people out for walks in their neighborhoods and slumped in transportive cinemas and sexing in their cozies, and I think about corpses dissolving underground and workers with shrinking hearts and students with shrinking brains and zygotes with expanding selves, and I think about creatures devouring creatures below my consciousness.

Then I weary of thinking beyond my nest and I drifted into slumber and never found my cabin bed of snug velour last night and suddenly—daybreak!—a pinking and yellowing of the world toward whitish noon and my appointment with my divine clown in this purgatorial lull. I'm stiff from my sleep in the crow's nest. I descend to the deck and my prayer begins to bubble to the surface of my day. In my scrubbed galley I eat a breakfast of salted grapefruit and sugared coconut. I flip through my possible salutations: Dear God of Lonely Sailors—Creator of This Splendid Chaos—Lord of Comfort and Surprise—My Fellow Better Maker. I waver between wielding the stilted and oddly intimate *thees* and *thous* and *thines* or going into the breach pronounless, personless.

If I'm able to sail this galleon by myself, without crew, I wonder if also, perhaps, I alone—without cannon balls or musket or sword—could fend off a marauding vessel of cutthroats. I could outwit them, or out-imagine them—my conjured brimstone raining down upon their scurrilous heads. Or I could simply make them love me, or fear me, and treat me as a minor god they dare not vex. Or I could project myself to shore, to a secluded villa, and I could sit in its orangery, under bowers of fragrant citrus, out of sight and mind, perusing a tattered book of sermons. I'm not afraid of barnacles or barracudas or ruffians. My thoughts wander to my bungalow in the briny woods and to Timothea a-swim in the surf. This world should be more *and* and less *or!* That's what I'll tell my God—if my God attends my noon prayer. When the sun is straight above the galleon, I'll stride to the

prow and speak with earnestness and confidence and modesty—a fetching triad. I’ve things to say, and I expect my God—when my God exists—to listen.

I have a morning to spend, to use, to kill. It crosses my mind, on this already hot day, to go swimming—even at the risk of melancholia whilst thinking of Timothea in water elsewhere. I could swim around my galleon and invigorate my heart and exhaust myself for prayer. Language is harder for me when I’m restless. I strip off my clothes, lower the rope ladder for my subsequent dripping ascent, and climb the port bulwarks for my steep dive. Then I hesitate. These waters, I assume, aren’t sharkless. And if I have a god, the sharks might have a god, too, and my God might be unimpressed by my careless bravado. The shark God might claim to have sent me to its creatures as a gift, as bounty from above. My foot is bleeding. I’ve stepped on a rusty fishhook—a remnant, perhaps, of the gentleman with my father’s crown. And if the sharks have a god, bacteria might have a god, too, and from what I’ve witnessed of infection and disease and the death of my too timorous father, that’s power incarnate.

Naked sat I in the salty sunlight considering these matters of science and soul. Or naked sit I here, in this linguistic now, perched above vast oceanic indifference, able to tell my story in the moment. Once upon a time—I muse—humans rose out of the cooling waters as abdicating sea gods. We forfeited a vast dominion for terra firma. We might have reinvented ourselves as land gods, but the night sky soon humbled the divinity out of us and we embraced our mortality in muddy propagation toward dust-to-dust survival. Then some of us trudged to the wheaty midlands. Folk like Timothy sought solitude in altitude. Timothea and I—our lust healthy and viscous—lingered by the shore awaiting some change of heart and reconciliation with our origin, the defining substance of our planet.

In my peripheral vision I saw sharpness (plural!) slicing the water’s skin—confirmation of my dread. I feel my gut contract. I’m tense and

wholly tensed. As I squint into discernment I see they aren't sharks—those dorsal finned fish of ancient influence—but dolphins—comrade mammals who knew better than to flee the embrace of the sea for the frail glory of moon conquest. Timothea, I imagine, could have sent them my way as encouragement for my midday prayer. Timothea—my terrestrial love, dolphined as totem in story, *stenella coeruleoalba*. So I stood—vulnerable to narrative, my chest and arms outthrust—and dove. I'll penetrate the surface of the watery globe into cold obscurity and colder fame.

All *or* nothing is fallacy. All *and* nothing is truth. They're inseparable. The infinity of zero. I'd suffer for this if any persecuting power cared. All of this has yet to happen and all of it happened long ago. I'm absorbed by the sea. I youthen my mind. I younger my heart. I pierce the water with my dive and the cold stuns me into breathlessness. I'll surface and gasp and switch the dolphins to sharks. I'll bleed into ocean time. I'll raise a storm and strike my masts with lightning and whirlpool the world into idea. If the sharks have souls, may their gods have mercy upon them. I drip upon the wood of the deck. My skin tingles, missing the water, remembering the air. I seek comfort in the shade of the cabin. I sought comfort in composing scrolls to Timothy. He wrote of sermons and sheep and a beast. I told of Timothea and her cloudy womb. Such exchanges deny full sovereignty to worms and such.

As I dress for my prayer and pull my shirt almost over my head—I smell Timothea!—I reconsider and plan to meet my God as I came into this world's air. So naked I stay. And I think the crow's nest—and not the prow—might be the proper rendezvous spot, eliminating temptations to kneel or prostrate myself. Under the galleon, in the blue murk, my concave dive leaves me disoriented. I swim toward light and surface into a sparkling grotto. Let me say here and now that we choose our world—every perpetrator, every victim, every bystander—every princess and fool—every god or God. The grotto



shimmers with a boy's imagination. Once upon a time and happily ever after—the treasures of death—the friction of language. Now I swear to a convex rapture. Now I shiver in this cavern of skeletons and jewels. The captain's bed is next to empty, its velvet coverlet turned back as invitation. Weary of the future, I relent. The silk pillows receive me as prodigal explorer. Sleep swifts me. I dreamt I didn't dream—a dream I've never dreamt.

When waking to dank gleam, I felt the dread of our planet's spin—I must have twisted beyond noon and missed my appointment with one of time's arbiters. At the far end of the grotto a tunnel led into blackness. Leaving the bones and gems—the spoils of my discovery—I stepped around chests and candelabras and chandeliers and sought the dark. With one hand on the moist wall and one arm outstretched in front of me, I progressed. A slow shuffle toward our unknown territory. This corridor led to a shaft, a hollow column through a hollow crossbeam, latitude and longitude, a conjunction of  $x$  and  $y$  coordinates. If I hadn't felt the altering of air, of lonely heights blended with the steam of some underworld, I might have tumbled into the abyss. As it was, I stood frozen in place, waiting for my eyes to adjust to total darkness, a fanciful process, sensing vast stretches above and below and a corresponding tunnel across the gulf.

Lying in the captain's bed, unable to sleep, rehearsing my prayer for the thousandth time, still damp between the satin sheets, I study a tapestry hung from the cavern wall. In the vague light of subterranean phosphor, it looks to portray a tempest, a violent storm assailing a castle on a rocky island. A king—or scholar—stands upon a parapet, about to be struck by a bolt of lightning. To say I possess this identical image in a painting at my bungalow would be hyperbole, I admit—but one of uncanny likeness, by my witness. A taller castle. A shorter king. Sharper rocks. Bluer lightning. Comparable ferocity. In the painting at home, the king's head is bowed. In this tapestry, he wields a sword. I shut my eyes. I conjure Timothea. I press the heel of my hand into

the small of her back. I fit an emerald into her navel. My pirates, as phantoms, fly up the shaft into the versioned world.

On board my galleon—whilst eating a honey sandwich—I watch the sun climb toward its zenith. I worry that my prayer is insufficient, lacking in clarity or nuance, bloated with digressions. I rehearse it for the thousandth time. Perhaps my God would prefer extemporaneous conversation as relief from omniscience. I rub my brow. The quick swim with the dolphins—meant to refresh me—has muddled my head. I'm nagged by the thought that my prayer is prayed, and for answer I've been given forgetfulness and a bucket of questions. It's bother and blessing—this inkling that I already know what I need to know—but I won't dump my bucket in the landfill of complacency or ignorance.

One can muse upon the center of the universe, the original explosion, the ever eventful expansion, the once supposed collapse into the forever point—one can grasp the insignificance of center when speaking of the spatial all. If I were at the core of a sphere, gravitationally intact, I could hover—with a smidgen of imagination—at its midpoint. Here—in this cave of up and down and back and across—if I stepped into the emptiness, I would plummet. My father's final words upon his deathbed—"I'm falling!"—could become those of his son. I think of Timothy and the bottomless pit of a wordless beast—I listen for breathing not my own.

In my palm I clutch a ruby. I open my fingers and stick my hand out the cabin porthole and the gem sparkles in the high sunlight. I don't—for a moment—remember how I came by this ruby in my swim around my galleon. A shark's eye? Then—the cavern, the captain's bed, the skeleton bedfellow, the stolen tapestry, the tunnel to oblivion. What we make of ourselves we make of time. We tender our violence with tears and temper our love with blood. The ruby is a pretty stone. Water and sky complement one another in sight and dream. Grant me these. I sit naked—salt-flecked, bewildered. The

sound of one's heart in one's head is never simple, never whole. I toss the ruby overboard.

In the captain's bed I'm neither captain nor king nor scholar—I'm mate, come to ransack. I'm overwrought—as if I'm alive. A skeleton of clean death preceded my satin rest. I smooth a spot below my pillow with my palm and place a ruby and an emerald and an opal in a triangle, a private constellation of oblique import. If these were the bones of a captain—mine or not—I'd tell his tale as if I were his marrow. I don't remember serving under him. I don't remember his conquests in ports. I don't remember moonlight on his brow. If I ever advised him to spare a captive child's life, I recall neither my eloquence nor his action. Now he stares at an earthen glittering heaven—without emotion or with great emotion—I cannot say. I could sleep with him for thousands of days if he were Timothea, my white shroud. A spine between ribs and shoulderblades. A conduit of deflected bravery.

In this site-specific darkness I romanticize my failings. I'm a doldrummed storm. I'm a fierce peace. If I wait long enough—patient as the tomb—perhaps Timothy will drop into his vale's pit and accompany me into silence. I hammock myself over the void. I swallow an opal for luck. I gaze up my shaft awaiting noon and that quick pierce of light. Tell me I'm wrong to yearn for solution, to fabricate tension, to twist harmony. Spend my thoughts at the carnival midway. Toss them into the hats of subway buskers. Buy matches or a flower with them. Give my prayer to a pack of gods. Go visit Timothy—if wished—in his snuggery in his nook in his castle keep in his fortress in his glen at one end of his seclusion. Speak of me as pioneer, genuine and lost under a watery effort.

Histories are anecdotal swelling. Lightning strikes the penitent and defiant kings. Same with autobiographies. They thunder across lonely straits to crowded shores. Prophecy implodes the self toward certainty, the fabrication of a refined messiah. I varnish memory with hope. My practiced prayer holds the charms of friendly allusion and

my spirit holds nothing but wind.

I'll magellan myself around myself, the circumnavigation of experience. The native me beseeches our gods to save us all from ambition. They don't comply. I wish I were an orange of undeniable worth. I wish I were a bear in bushes laden with berries. My ship will sink if I pull its plug. My ego will deflate if I stab its chest. Our gods might scatter when we clap our hands. Our time is ambiguous—we stare over our fathers' shoulders as we're carried away from a playground melee—we hold our mothers' hands as we're led away from public tragedy.

I'll climb to the crow's nest, penis as flag. This windless day in this windless place isn't soothing. I'll rally my confidence and adjust my humility. I'll pray something proximal: "God of Mine—as the sun is my witness—hear me. Send another clue. We're confused. Life's mystery—this strange search for meaning, undodgeable and brutal—has us killing ourself. The promise of death doesn't fool us. The threat of everlasting life has gone stale. This won't do. I—" That won't do. Accusatory flourish or not, I must be unyielding. My God as my God should feel called, chosen from among all possibility. Let me begin again, spine as mast: "God of Mine, Almighty I—as the sun is my witness and the water my source—hear me. Faith is a ruse. Science is a scam. Nature is a whore. Idea is an idol. Come clean and show us truth—empirical and eternal. Grant me triangle insight in the moment. Grant us expansion and congruence, dispersal and contraction, quandary and surety—this very instant. Now!" Then I'll glow with eloquent force, speaking of discipline and devotion and the relationship between action and object. I'll ask for time to thunder itself. I'll swirl the universe above my head as a halo. I'll send lightning into secret corners and I'll electrify spiral towers. I'll charm my creator with the fear of god.

I might be delivered a son or I may be awarded a daughter or I could lie with Timothea in our fallow field. I'll vanish into the confluence

of common men. I would love to flock my pigeons—with scrolls of reverence and pride—beyond the echo of my passing. I would love to deliver a sweet plum to a bored mouth. In the meantime—on this galleon upon this sea of glass—I think I should go for another swim and reinvigorate my heart and perfect my prayer and try for tomorrow noon. Daylight has given way to twilight and I stand at my prow and make a wish upon a surprised evening star.

Timothy and Timothy—as boys—sit on a see-saw, tomorrow and yesterday, cooperatively even, the balance of equal weight on a playground of brutal eruption. Different see-saws, different playgrounds—time gulfed. Timothy’s striped shirt hearkens backward. A tree throws longer shade upon Timothy. Timothy’s freckles and Timothy’s dimples spar for our affection, and crew cut vies with wavy flop. Timothy watches the girl in kneesocks and spinster glasses. Timothy watches girls galore. This isn’t the tale of two Timothys. One is spoken in the west and one is watered in the east. One creates the other while the other creates one. Tributary to the wider rush. They’re the only Timothy. All across our nation—all nations, any nation—playgrounds dash to the future.

Timothy and Timothy, sitting in a tree, p-r-a-y-i-n-g. This is configuration. Shoelaces dangle. The shells of sunflower seeds get spat. God is cursed. Prayer opens souls to lightning strikes. Sonship on a limb with God as approximation. Timothy smiles at Timothy. The playground disaster wasn’t his fault. Trees care, but they don’t care about that.

Children don’t stay children. We hurtle toward wizened misery. Perspective crooked by twisting spines and bleached eyes. Then—for some of us—childhood redux. Timothy saw Timothy as sapling—conifer to his deciduous. Timothy saw Timothy as kindling—kindred to his dream. Sure—some people die peacefully in their sleep—some children never see adulthood—some willows don’t weep. Test not the weak of heart—so sayeth Timmy Thunder. Timothys succumb to

time, as do Johns and Pauls and Peters. The masculine shrinks in the feminine and love seeps to the seeking roots. Sainthood comes from the soil.

Children fight for territory—king of the hill, queen of the valley. Or we strive for home at the counting tree after our burst from our hiding spot. Boys stare at girls as if they were the newer gods. Timothy rises up and Timothy drops down and everyone on the playground is afraid of flying stinging insects. Our world breezes and throes toward its chosen end. Timothy bends, away from all of us and ours.

Here they'll be, be it known—endless sunlight fading in the grass. Some Timothys adore quirk and some crave glory. Some love glow and some thirst for skew. Some tilt toward evening suns. Some of us meet our doom under the sands of infidel caravans and some of us drown on galleons built for oceans and sunk as models in tubs. This Timothy fathers a son and that Timothy does likewise. Timothea births them in solstice pain under a winter sky in her private vale. Neither boy saves his sphere from doubt or belief. Neither boy's boy does either—doubt and belief are oxygen and hydrogen in combination. Let us now praise earnest endeavor, bold righteousness, grit and gall—let us support children and their crazy ideas before the Earth grows old and cold. Timothy and Timothy held hands at naptime.

Death comes to those who wait in their snuggeries as well as to those who skedaddle screaming under a falling sky. Sooner and later are indistinguishable across the lives of universes. Children die because adults can't always protect them from harm, even when they promised they would. God—if God exists—doesn't spare us death, shielding us not from its close breath. We're given death for life.

What Timothy didn't know Timothy doesn't know and their not-knowing dusks the playground as if it weren't mid-morning. The wilderness is always a blink away—not even a whole blink. The playground exists without children. Children on holiday. Children grown and gone and married and careered and buried. Children

as ash. Parades of children march through the playground in their cute little suits of fate. The weekend playground breathes and aches. Playgrounds are awkward edens. Timothy smiles at Timothy in their blameless breezy arbor. They'll erase the tomb.

Timothy concocts a beast and Timothy adjusts a totem. Their gods lurk in a braid hung down a narrowing back and in the terrain of tree bark. As boys—if we speak of them thus—they're essentially harmless. Boys don't stay boys and neverlands ungreen before our eyes while opinions twist to dizzying heights and flutter into pits without bottom. Every elderly woman was once girl. She was young—the matron was maid, the venerable was vernal—not so long ago. The dirty kneesocks become fishnet stockings become therapeutic hose in half a blink. Timothy's nose and ears grow. Timothy's muscles and hairline shrink. Their ideas petrify. We slide from slick infancy into cliché and the jaws of God.

Now we are children and we are molten. If the see-saw were to become a carousel, we might ride stained-glass dragons through the flaming surf. As things are, Timothy and Timothy alternate elevations and revelations and grins of recognition—they'll share this inscrutable action. What it means to be self and what it means to be other are more than what it means to be cloud, to be curious, to be born, to be troubled, to be friends. What it means to be molten is spontaneous fancy. I make a selection from my language in hopes of influence, in pursuit of angled accuracy. Timothy's expectations collect mold in tight cupboards and Timothy's knees are scabbed from praying on broken mirrors. Or Timothys shine in the darkness of a lost grotto.

The common world never melts and weaves and hardens the twin-born glories of women's breasts into chain-mail. Timothy and Timothy create Timothea in a blacksmith's forge from the orphaned weaponry of a hundred ill-fated attacks. Then they soften her into surrender cloth. Then, in divinely inspired glee, they wrap her around the sons of men for their descents beyond the grave. She'll soon



possess a wayfarer's nerve to pretend to be them—the Timothys of futile assaults on castles thick and tall—those playground boys of sour breath. Violent love and merciful vengeance grip the adolescent heart. The unfillable need for tenderness parches their lungs. Most of them grow up.

So we mature from confusion into disaffection, our bodies yearning for specific disregard—the casual acknowledgment of our one and only—immediate lust to be left alone a half moment longer. Then consummation. Then consumed. Timothy stashes his pewter pirates and sailors and boats in a tree hollow. Timothy carves a bride from a hunk of birch. Weather threatens. Timmy Lightning focuses force and Timothy Thunder scatters fright. Two protagonist boys in a tree make tempting targets. Timmy Lightning resists story. A sapling in a vacant lot is scorched. A child atop a playground slide is plucked clean shy of her gravity. Whose one and only was she—if she was someone's one and only—if ones and onlies are ever allowed to miss their connections. This is glowing sorrow.

If the carousel were to slip out of balance and become skewed—tilting on its axis and whirling high and low—a revolving see-saw—we might ride albino whales below the liquid ground. As things are, Timothy and Timothy swing their legs from the tree limb and bump their shoes—they share this average action. What it means to be articulated and what it means to be mobile aren't what it means to be water, to be satisfied, to be alive, to be complacent, to be gods. Now we are skeletons and we are ash. What it means to be mutable is prophetic adaptation. I choose to interpret narrative as obsessive destiny. Timothy fails to impress and Timothy's impressions bind themselves to selved folklore. Or Timothys go dark under noon's stare.

We stoop or tiptoe to peer into the factory of our heroes. Timothy is infatuate. Timothy is conflagrate. They know themselves flawed and unheavened. Timothy would sex the bespectacled wallflower if she

were willing. Timothy would sex the female kingdom if he could. Timothea is a blood-filled time-tempered life-cauldron, crown to toe, ribs to bloom, tidal and milky and lunar and oval and warm—or she's a figment, boyish chimes of girlhood freedom. She compounds her Timothys. She stencils them onto her bell. They pendulum and peal into schoolhouse slumber. All of our Timothys spiral out of tall chimneys. They curl through the long morning shadows.

Then, on a still summer's day, Timothea stands on the treelimb over the waterhole and pretends she is diving into the sea from the bulwarks of a galleon. This is her dream at the swimming hole to be with her Timothy. Timothy is there also—freckles and cutoffs and hairless chest—and all Timothys pretend to be sharks when she surfaces. She kicks Timothy in the stomach. He goes belly up, just playing, a slain shark. She makes them dogs, and pristines herself to a tarn above a castle. They bark and dogpaddle and fetch sticks and shake themselves dry on shore. She controls them with tender patience. She provides sweetmeats. Timothy and Timothy tire of their canine loyalty and declare themselves pirates, swarthy and cruel. They capture Timothea and bind her to the tire swing with wet reeds. They threaten to shove her over the lava pit until the rope catches fire if she doesn't surrender her treasure. An afternoon breeze arises. She treasures them. They die. They become skeletons. Her Timothys. Then, before the summer day dwindles, before fate scattershots them, they sun themselves on a boulder—young skin under a younger sky. They've been tidily vignettted.

We suffer from choice and from lack of choice. Somewhere unknown to us— between freewill and destiny, between scabby knees and false teeth—we are undone. Lightning strikes twice—at the same place, at the same time. Timmy Thunder cymbals against himself trying to narrate the event. Language meld. Palindromic weave. The human tree. I twist from my paper into my seed. Timmy Lightning is prompted from outside my atmosphere. If we can be moons, we can be

planets. If we can be planets, we can be stars. If stars, then galaxies. If galaxies, universes. If universes, gods. If gods, anachronistic. We revel in individual choicelessness. Our beasts are fables. They're composites. They're molecular. Our beasts aren't fables. They're assigned. They're supposed. Our beasts shall fable and cement us into scientific truth.

Timothy and Timothy—their sights set on faraway interior places—playground themselves into ego. We are angels with foibles. We are bullies with heart. We are towers with consciences. In our depths hover souls and we stalk time as if we believed we were going to be allowed to love time. Our fear of time might kill us before time itself. Eventually I'll die, out of time, having tried as hard as I could. Timothy and Timothy—as did their chronicler—tried their hardest. Their failure isn't their story.

Once upon a time, in Timothea's mind, in her schoolyard flurry—striped socks flashing, skirt flared, hair flung—she thrived. She surrounded boyish volatility and contained their violent bursts. Still, one of them found seed and took root and spiraled toward God—if God exists—from out of Timothea's loam. One—the rest of them—was windblown across obsolescence. Playgrounds erupt with their strange beasts. The suffering isn't arbitrary or newsworthy or crisp. Timothea—her imagination a link in the causality chain—sought dispersal. Thus, her eyes sparkled for a willow stump—a runt of a stage.

We don't want God so much as we want ourselves. The nation of Timothy—on the continent of doubt in the hemisphere of thought—attics itself into anecdotal dust, cellars itself into confessional must. Timothy sits alone after climbing the jungle gym. Timothy strikes the tetherball with his fist. Timothy eyes the girls as duty, whereas Timothy looks upon them as gift. Timothy observes the shyest one. Timothy flocks them all. The day stays this way forever and everything changes. Time pounds us into adults. Timothy's body fails Timothy and Timothy fails his body and the most loyal of bodies still

succumbs in the end and lets go. Timothy dangles from the chin-up bar. Timothy tickles him. Timothy's pole isn't permanent. Timothy drops to the ground. This isn't a moment of intrigue. Let's ring the school bell. Let's flirt with our ancestors.

Now we wrap their language in cellophane. Now we pigeon their thoughts home for the holidays. Now we disinter their words from ruins. Now we tattoo them into our palms. If only we bled into our books. If only our bodies were scrolls flown into one another's lonelinesses. If only our ash were in our loaves. If only everyone inhabited everyone's prayers and dreams. Then—the breezes blowing through the playground trees—the playground trees swayed by childhoods—our haunting laughter spent and heaven sent. Now we listen for our heartbeats in their sermons and homilies and lullabies.

Immensity thrills our Timothy. As does regress, of the infinite kind. Mortality lurks in a hole in the yard. Timothy's pillow supports his skull. Life's knick-knacks—the plunder of a brave boyhood—clutter the room he thinks of as a cavern. Tapestries of infamous deeds hang from the walls. Timothy's schoolbooks make a cairn atop his steamer trunk, marking a path above his timberline toward less oxygen. Timothy and Timothy want to expose their flatland souls to firmament, with nods to their friendship and waves to the populace. Timothy and Timothy want to ride out the risen sea. Timothy stuffs his bear with scribbled fondness. Timothy jackals his neighborhood dogs. The Timothys strive to win their playground games. The Timothys Timothea their baths, but they clasp their own hands against their sternums in their nightly slumbers, alone in their twin beds on ancient coasts.

We don't want our truths so much as we want God's scope. We wish to stride across godscape barefoot in blustery weather. We whitecap our water and clear our throats to sing. We pump our blood to the planet's core. Trees live on our tears. We try to read their bark and then we try to read their stumps and then we read

stacks of dead books in the hush of our heads. Our questions seek air and light. Every answer is a death.

Timothy and Timothy, sitting in a tree, love and marriage and baby carriages on their far horizons, beyond vales and galleons and oases and grottoes—*precors gelida quando pecus omne sub umbra ruminat*. On a dare, they shimmy along the narrowing limb to where it hangs over a bottomless pit, their dangling boy-legs pale against the darkness. Timothy has a lock of Timothea's hair in his flannel pocket. Timothy has the memory of Timothea on his tongue. God exists, they chance to feel—if existence lasts, they tend to think.

So Timothy races Timothy to the willow—to its drooping bowers while it lives, and to its stump after it has been chopped down and cured as firewood for the snuggery's hearth. They sprint across the clover without fear of stones or thorns, graves or angels. They collapse in the treeshade. Timothy—ribs intact, hair self-mussed, spirit beyond weeping—holds Timothy—ill of life and caroused with redemption—one Timothy practicing death in another Timothy's arms. From atop the spiral tower they might look more like animals than gods.

Now comes the newer ending, a raveled strand unattended, a wistful glance into the margins of a life still lived, the far-flung excuse of a persevering ego. I'd like a beast to burrow into my nook—a philosopher skeleton, a silent thinking soul—able to project into my skull a righteous and merciful god or a willowy self of uncommon kindness. And this beast—a clone of my younger hopes—would protect me from wasted time by spending it for me through nonexistence. It would discourage visitors—that visitor or two I desire—clever travelers, prodigies of motion—and in this tension would unfold a life worth living.

I could be churchgoer and father and caregiver. My pews could be a berm around a very deep pit and my child could be born of another's seed and my charge could be an ungreening glen of antique

promise. Wanderers would stumble upon my hideaway. I could be the electricity in her clouds. I could be the rumble of his faith. Their sweaters would match without looking identical and I would mend them whenever they were motheaten or ragged. They could swim in my tarn. They could bathe in my rock hollow. They could snuggle in my nook.

Here they were, be it told—children of mine in divine unknowing. Some of us were imagined and some of us were shepherded and some of us were unsainted and some of us were caged and some of us flew wild. Some of us—out of fabulous design—arose from nurturing muck. Some of us are the stuff of dreams and some of us are the stuff of legend and some of us are smoke and mirrors. None of us are all of us, but any of us is some of us. If wished—O please—come visit. Bring another. Time waits.