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Strange Machine

[IN WHICH THE HEART IS AN INTRICATE PHONAUTOGRAPH]

Unravel me,  
strange machine,  
with this deciduous murmur,  
your brass and steel.  
Reinscribe the notes  
of my threadbare song.  
Carve my name  
upon metal and wax.  
O phonautograph,  
your little dial  
turns within  
the body's sleek walls.  
Yet when the needle  
sparks, how the bones glow.  
The throat, a lantern.  
Light catching  
in the folds  
of each  
unspoiled wrist.

[IN WHICH THE COMPOSITION REMAINS UNFINISHED]

If only my troubles were those of a musician. In which the grand concerto is born of method and order. One has but to accept the deliberate pulse of a metronome, a steady rising of octaves, the oscillating hand of a tuxedoed conductor. Arrangements intersect and the player is met with song. Which suggests a performance is not the opium dream of its maker, but rather, a strange machine groaning into the colorless night. See, for example, the tiny gears turning within each violinist's heart.

[IN WHICH A MAN BECOMES A CATHEDRAL, GREAT WITH SONG]

And tonight, our story laid out on stained glass windows. First, the burning city. Then salt, always my arms crumbling as they reach for you. Speak to me and I am the ruined harp, its disheveled choir. Still I dream you in Latin, in prayers and saint's teeth. Tomorrow, high mass. Here a worn steeple, there the rickety pews. Yet you are the sweeping arcades, their dusty marble cherubs. Are every dove nested in the belfry. The difficult hymn that will begin again at sunrise.

[PASTORAL: IN WHICH ONE'S FAITH MAY BE SEEN AND TOUCHED]

Always night, always a listless moon as we drive into the prairie's thistled heart. Around us, knotweed. Its twisted foliage, the anxious spark. His body still rooms opening within a room, the staircase burning in a locked house. Reassure me, ravenous grassland. With your endless droughts. With each of your soot meadows, their heaps of dead aster. He has yet to return the hymn to my merciful throat.

[IN WHICH THE SONG IS A FIELD, WHITE WITH SNOW]

When the music begins, I stand at the ground's knotted edge.  
I think of the cello with its smoke filled rooms,  
its one dark red note. The threshold  
all stars and dead poppies. Wind  
turning like a phonograph within the field's  
tangled heart. O iced pasture, meadow  
in this minor key, could the cello's dim etude unsettle you yet?  
A yellow moon limps between nerve wracked clouds.  
The song pressing on like a rundown house.  
The clearing's blank stare reflected in every unlit window.