



/JOSHUA YOUNG / / PSALMS OF THE WRECKAGE / / GOLD WAKE PRESS /

Psalms of the Wreckage

i.

this one's for the kids who didn't make the cut.

look how the bottle's been dry for hours
and everyone's one step away from giving
up the ghost, except for the ones in the corner
who took up praying at sunday dinner.
they speak across tables and rooms
as though they're introducing colors to the dark
or guitar twang to silence.

ii.

this one's for the girls who talked successful skin and the smooth surfaces
of photographs or water on fresh concrete—

this before babies with high school heroes, made in back of cars,
at basement parties, or bathrooms of bars, and one or two in the stock
room.

robbed of their old conversations, of their sleek young bodies.
it's not the bodies they miss, but the silence of being single at night,

when all that's heard is a lovers snore, or what's blowing outside.

now in the silence, they listen for their babies, they listen for death
foot stepping in the room, she's always curious around cribs.

iii.

this ones for the kids singing battle hymns in the bloodied fog of dawn.

they're at it,

unaware of what's coming.

their bodies have become machines who rise and fall with the sun.

the melody flattens when the sun

peaks through and the fog becomes a curtain.

iv.

this ones for the crowd settling at the edge of the storm,
while peddlers toe up to open windows with palms full, leave with fists
full.

the body's there, curled up and cold.
the parent's are headed out, from the way back of town,
panic thickening when they see the crowd.
in the woods, lovers once fled from murders, from the scene,
and into the storm.

if chase were given, someone would surely gain.

only here, it's not the law that follows, it's guilt.

v.

this one's for all these kids who want to be cowboys.

yes, and they'd buy a pistol to spin the chamber late
at night, just 'cause it sounds cool, that click and clicking,
and, it makes them look like real men with real power,
to young girls—makes them feel like real men;
that thick fucking handshake deep in their palms—
like prodigal sons or cowboys late for the gunfight.

vi.

this one's for all the kids ascending,
you know,

the ones who start dropping down the hill as if
they could vanish in the silence of curves before
the straight lines of the city its arms open, ready
to suffocate what's expendable and keep what it can use.

look,

birds gather like a choir on rooftops looking in windows at lovers
over sheets—
the tv glare
rubbing itself against the skin—

and these pastures
start humming
remnants of hymns
about what it means to

go west.

vii.

this one's for the kids mouthing off the sheriff's deputy
when he comes around for questioning.

had someone seen the thing go down?

the girl had only found blood.

if someone had, they would've seen one of the shooters
cringe at the touch of the barrel against his skin
when he tucked it, still hot, into his pants.

years later, his part-time lover will trace his body to stop on it.
when asked, he'll recall the story, but only tell it as though
he's a hero saving girls from boys full of lust and thirst.

this happens in a motel
when he's thirty-two

and still trying to unhook himself from the choice that claimed his
twenties.

viii.

this one's for the kids
making calls for the future king.
decked out in leather and corduroy
they hang in phone booths
listening to dial tones and constant ringing.

no,

the calls don't come from the hills and canyons of the city,
but spreads from an echo
inside a cave north of missouri, and before
it reaches where it should, all wet and heavy,
it turns into a steady bass note
quivering through the plains,
 over rivers,
up into tree branches and rooftops.

ix.

this one's for the kids left from the wives of frontier men,

the ones settled and tired.

these kids only know what lies inside the four corners of
borders.

the range packs them in and only a few think to ask
what's in the dirt outside where the horizon slacks.

the answers come out rusted and aged,
centered in folklore the town made
back when the woods still spoke to them.

x.

this one's for the men who lost livestock when the kids from iowa city burned the livery, 'cause they hated the way it looked, all rusted and chipped. "you better not be misremembering where you came from," one of the boys screamed after the fire is set. to escape, they slipped down the river in the weight of the night. the water carries them, loosens them from their sins, peels the city right off, trading asphalt and glass for the skeletons of the ghost woods. when they wake, they are surrounded by trees and dark thick as soil.

one says, "where are we."

then, the wolves start in.

