

**A Good Death**

He snuck a smoke on the porch  
when his daughter left for work,  
when his daughter left for work,  
a shot of her brandy in his coffee,  
watched the morning shows in her  
living room on her tv, then rambled  
over to the roadhouse where it was dark  
inside and he could stare at the rows  
of bottles behind the bar and talk  
to his dead wife, dead parents,  
dead friends, dead almost everyone,  
even the crushed dog, then wander back  
his glasses on the dresser, stretch out  
on the bed and remember everything  
all at once where she found him  
when she got home.

**Pompeii**

A dog made of tile embedded in the floor,  
the rising price of olive oil still  
faintly outlined on a wall.  
Inside a roofless villa, a mural of a couple  
in careful ringlets, a touch of rouge  
still smile at each other across the years,  
happy that France and Belgium have not  
yet occurred, no one has ever thought  
of Russia and the German tribes hunker  
in bark huts along the Rhine: it is still  
such a long way until history becomes itself.  
Their eyes are dark and shining, as if they've been  
drinking excellent wine for hours from  
the vineyards creeping up the higher slopes  
toward the little cloud above bald Vesuvius.

**How to read Crossing Brooklyn Ferry**

You will need a darkness well past midnight,  
a single cone of desk light to guide you  
sightful with its long white hand.  
And you will need to need these words, spoken  
across three separate centuries, his whisped  
breath against your ear from narrow streets  
of horse manure with drying sheets and longjohns  
stretched between brick walls, spoken from  
eyes that also heard these human musics,  
saw the sky upside down in glistening water,  
and just like you knew the motionless wings,  
soaring slow circles of the gulls.

**Taking Apart the Map**

Road signs erased, the freshly  
nameless highways unravel  
west to east, the sputter of billions  
of tires sighing with collapse.  
All the small towns fade into horizon,  
the faces of their houses wilt, the broken  
eyes watch prairie distances return,  
the sky hangs out its weary sheets to dry.  
No more heads for the pigeons  
to crap on, no more pigeons,  
those old men bitching on the bench  
before the empty storefront,  
their thoughtless paper skulls,  
died childless, mapless  
long before this poem began.

**Teaching with chalk dust on my back**

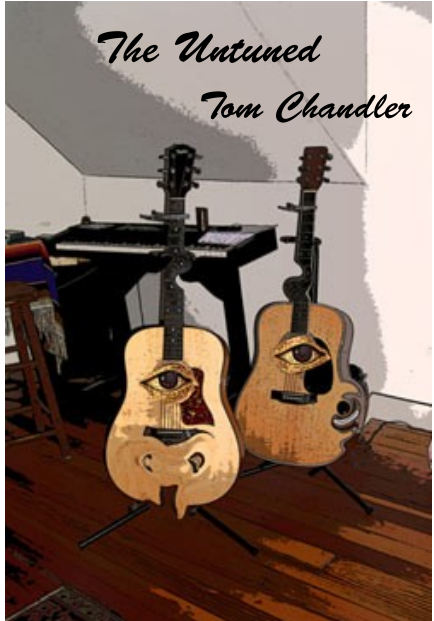
and car keys jiggling in my pocket  
and a nagging crick in my right knee  
I stand before the class  
with Robert Frost in my mouth.

I can see the stone walls in my head,  
the dark forest of which no saying will  
quite be dark enough, tree line of pine  
and birch as frayed as these sentences  
I keep trying to mend, word placed  
solid against word against the sweep  
of snow across abandoned farms,

the ruined barns and broken glass,  
ache of memory and why the gray  
disguise of years could never hide  
the aging boy who lived inside himself  
and made this music out of pain  
that walked beside him all his life.

Credits

- “A Good Death” - Prairie Schooner
- “How to Read *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*”  
- The Briar Cliff Review



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