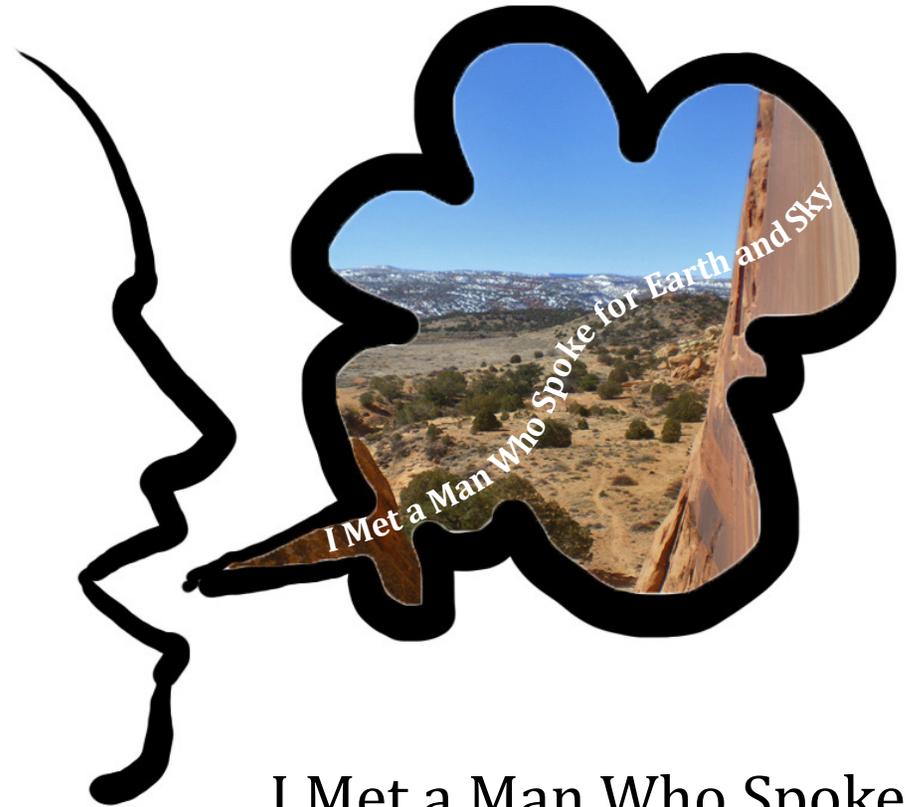


Austin Anderson recently graduated from UVU with his B.A. in English-Creative Writing and a minor in Spanish. He has had work published in Warp & Weave, a speculative fiction journal ran in Utah County, and HEX Magazine, a creative insert in the UVUReview. Austin enjoys looking towards the clouds, the trees, the mountains, towards anything and everything for poetic inspiration. He currently lives in Utah County with his wife and their hopes and dreams for children and puppies.



I Met a Man Who Spoke for Earth and Sky

Austin Anderson



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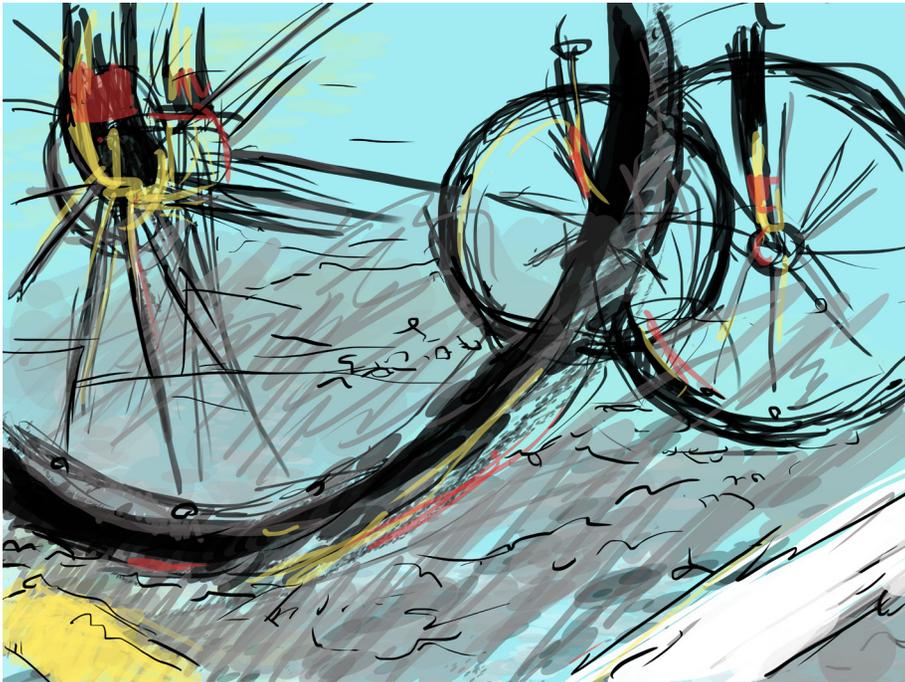
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A Round Trip to Heaven/Hell



Standing like saints
and sinners, we awaited rapture
or judgment, beneath us,
aluminum and carbon fiber
frames, spokes webbed across
rubber tires, oiled gears
and chains connecting
pedal to wheel to ground.
We watched sunlight roll back
shadow rugs and mats and leave
asphalt like one-hundred
twelve miles of bare
plywood wrapping round
to heaven for some,
to hell for others—
both a state of mind:
euphoria or exhaustion.
We crowded the white
line; some pawed cleats,
the rest stood looking
back at parked cars
and cheering families—all
waiting for the snap
of the pistol, the crack
like the unlocking
lock of golden gates wrapped
in pearly clouds or like
the clank of chains wrapped
around wrists and ankles.
We watched the pistol rise
above our heads, the hammer
leaning back, then heard
the shatter, and some began the road
to heaven, and some started to hell.

Vandalism and Chairs and Self

There is more to what moves
 me to stick peppermint under my chair than the lack
 of will to move from my seat
 and throw it all away—more than the brown glazed brick,
 walling my attention down the hallway;
 the hum of vending machines, each like a pied piper;
 the openings between buttons
 in my one-size-too-small shirt and the strangers
 that look at me and see my bald head,
 my thirty-six hour shadow, and me knowing
 they see through the one-inch gaps in my shirt
 and see the black hair that rings
 my belly button. It is knowing
 that the woman who sits here after me
 will not know why the world suddenly smells
 like peppermint, knowing that a man will
 one day reach down to pick up a fallen paper
 and find my gum hanging upside down;
 it's that satisfaction that Columbus felt, that Armstrong felt,
 staking land with some piece of them tied atop a flagpole—
 I spit my gum into my hand
 and claim this chair for myself and my nation of selves.

Tip-Tap Goes the Rain Drum

The six-year-old held her ballet slippers in hand,
 standing on the porch, her father half outside,
 half inside. What is it, sweetie? He might have asked.
 (I can't hear them from across the street, but I wanted to know
 what she watched.) And she dropped the pointe shoes, and tapped
 her sandals
 on the concrete. The rain, Daddy. I've never heard it like this before.

He waited at the door and she tip-tapped for a beat like a blind
 woman fumbles
 with her hands to find a wall, to know the room and her place in it.

The girl nodded her head with the time of rain on the roof and
 street,
 every slap of her sandals deliberate. She danced there for ten minutes,
 learning and dancing the universal rhythm of rain. Her father
 watched, called her in.
 Can I take tap, Dad? The door closed, the pale slippers on the porch.



I Wonder if it Started as a Race

On your marks—

God stands on a podium in heaven with the pistol of thunder and lightning.

Get set—

Dark and Light tilt their heads down, fingers spanning the edge of the white line.

Go—

Thunder and lightning snap from God's pistol;

Dark and Light take the first few steps,
leaning forward into the wind of the run.

They run so fast with strides so powerful,
the heavens begin to move beneath them.

And they race for millennia, neck and neck,
spinning the firmament of nothing.

The crowd grows tired; God hears their complaints:

Why are we here? What's the point? Isn't there an end?

So He trips Dark, giving Light a step ahead,
and pleasing the murmuring crowd.

But they still run, Light and Dark, rushing the world through
rotations;

Dark always on the heels of Light.

Too Much Will Always Be Too Much

On the beach, sea
foam bubbles the moment
the wave reaches
too far. Green sprouts
out of sand and through
the cascade of air and water, a tide
of rice blossoming into white
church bells that ring for a bride
and groom. The foam
falls back into million
miles of salt water, leaving
the church steeples
alone with sand
dune and seashell.
The next wave
pushes the church
bells inland then uproots
steeple, bell, and chapel
to drown in too much
foam, too many
hands throwing
too much rice.

I Wrote a Poem

The poet is the potter, I said.
My hands don't dirty, though.
I don't clean my fingernails
after writing one poem or two poems or ten poems.
My studio doesn't have a wheel
to spin or clay and knives.
I have a desk.
I have a notebook and pencils.
The potter stops the spinning vase and closes one eye;
I look at my poetry with both eyes open, and both ears too.
Does the potter cup a hand to his ear
and lean in close to hear how the pot beats,
how the bowl rings and ripples with sound?
So, when I said, The poet is the potter,
either I was dead wrong
or I'm no poet.

A Butterfly People

They pull skins up and down
around themselves, cocoons
of cotton (a dried-up snow
grown then picked) or wool
(a dried-up snow grown on
the back of four-legged animals
then shaved). They stay in these fabrics
for their whole life, changing
underneath them, aging underneath them.
They say it's appropriate—a word
for warmer, I think,
or maybe a word for not
being naked while working or eating
or driving or running or living,
or even dying,
except for bed-wrestling and swimming
in the smallest of porcelain ponds
or under the rain of metal clouds fastened
to the same walls that hide their waste
in even smaller porcelain ponds that drain
through the house into the ground.
And then they plant little bits
of gravel in the waste
that borders their homes, a magical waste
because gravel pushes up
green stalks with yellow
and purple buds. All the while,

on their knees
moving and digging in waste,
they wear their woven shells on their backs
and around their feet, hiding from the sun
and growing wings or legs
or extra eyes or something—
(There must be something
growing under it.)
All without anyone knowing.

Carpet.

Dried grass,
 mowed only
 once to a quarter
 inch. Smell cardboard
 moving boxes in the dust;
 as you lick the carpet, feel
 the bits of twined and spun
 hair stapled to plywood and glued
 to cement. Grab with your naked toes
 to kick up fibers and breathe them in to taste
 dirt and feet soles and bits of frozen pizza crust.
 Lie down and roll across the room from desk to bed to counter,
 roll to give it voice and make it heard, then listen to the whispers—I am,
 I am, I am.

A Moment of Self-Reflection

As I turned the corner, spinning the room
 in my palm and watching a woman and man grab
 at the walls for balance, I realized I might be evil.
 To crave widened eyes and buckled knees,
 the sharp gasp before a scream—
 I'm told that is evil. But I don't crave,
 I don't hunger, I don't thirst for fear.
 I pick up houses and turn their corners
 to be noticed as living and moving and being.
 But as I twirled the pink stucco house in the air,
 flinging the table against the family picture
 on the wall, dropping the bookshelf to the floor,
 and opening each flying book to its heart,
 I asked, Am I evil? Could I really be so evil?
 The screams and the crashing china replied,
 Yes, Yes. You are evil.
 So I spun on. I spun faster,
 pressing their bodies up deeper into the wall
 until they couldn't scream with the air that rushed into their mouths
 and spread their cheeks and pulled back the skin around their eyes,
 and I whispered into the windows,
 If I am evil, then I must do as evil does.

It Must Have Been the Root Beer

I couldn't stop; none of us could. Tickled from the walls
of our stomachs through muscle and bone to skin, we howled laughter.

The families and couples and friends eating their hamburgers tried not to look,
but the clap of shaking yells from shaking bodies broke silence after silence

after awkward, wide-eye, brow-raising silence. We were too young to know to stop,
to respect the public air space, to revere and not disturb the private sounds

at each booth and table. The rootbeer in our mugs laughed with us, bubbling in
our mouths, fizzing up and up, until it burned down nostrils, spilling brown snot

and feeding back into our open mouths. The silverware seized on plastic tabletops
or writhed silently on napkins, the glass mugs sang in our universal pitch.

We laughed, then the Big H laughed, the city laughed, and for a moment,
the world ringed like crystal as our laughter fingered its lip.

Beat for More than Light and Color

After "Paint It Black" by The Rolling Stones

I paint a picture and the doors I all paint black.
They say I'm crazy, pin my arms behind my back.
I twist and spin and flail to try to run from foes
that don't see black in things, or how the blackness grows

round a beating heart that beats in my chest and back
for more than red or white or colors and their lack.
They lock the door and leave me tied up to rot away
in white and light, but this beating black they'll never stay.

Austin

And I read to him poetry
underneath Orion and his belt of
stars, the world sliding beneath a carpet of million-degree
light bulbs,
tilting with the weight of all us
intent on grouping them by wattage, keeping
notes on which bulbs burn out.

Blue water beneath
white mountain, black rock, and sky—
silent waves roll, moan.

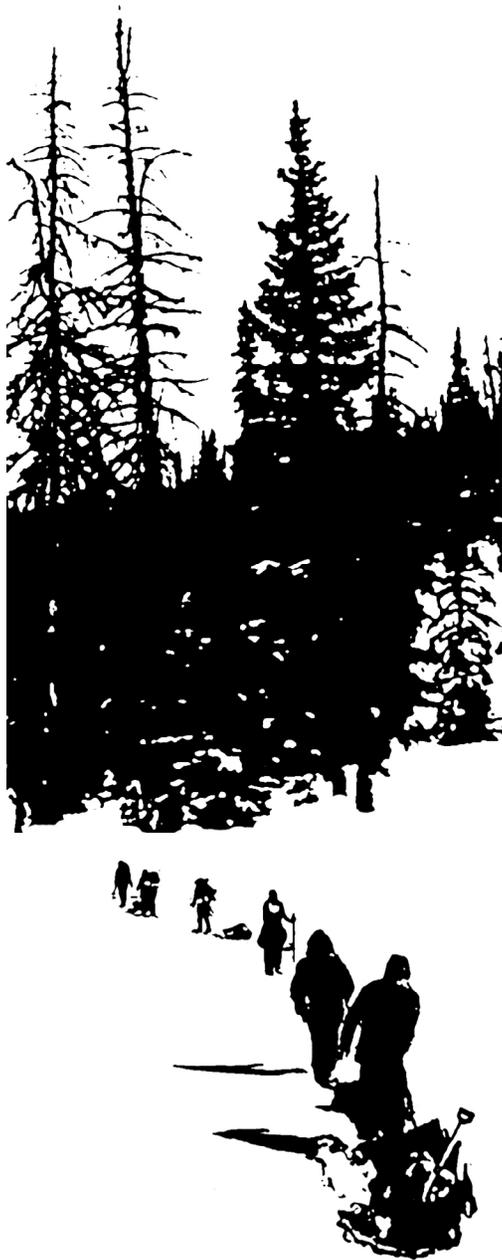
From Eyes that Look Down Look at Skating Eyes

She sits on dirty tiles, on ankles wrapped
beneath her thighs—those thighs that loved, had loved
the man who loved enough for two, enough
for kissing first, for loving second, rapt
in arms and hands. He loved enough for slapped,
for bruised and broken dances, two who shove
their partner, pressing backs on kitchen doves
on walls; the music, shouts; the beat, the tapped

linoleum. She sits on tiles; he lies
beside her, breathing shallow, short and soft.
She fingers hair then holds his hand and sees
how purple, green, how blue the light that shied
across his arms and bruises, over—off
his skating eyes that look up, blink, then flee.

Genesis One

Beginning in the darkness and God,
there was heaven and the genesis
he called first day.
And the created night.
And and the morning light.
The face of form, and, was good:
face of the light: and waters.
The light, the one moved, void:
and were the that it Earth.
And God Earth was there.
Be and the the deep.
Light, evening and God and the
from the called the Spirit of Darkness,
God without and God Light Day,
darkness was upon the saw
the divided God said, Let upon the



In a Black and White World, Which is the Negative

Black spots on white or white shapes
on black, a child's school project warped
and thick with glue on construction paper:
the family Dalmatian. I watched her cut the paper
with snub-nosed scissors, squint out the window
into the backyard, blow the bangs out of her eyes,
and put the circle with the rest. I saw the dog,
snout pressed against the ground, but I also saw
spring snowfields melting above black rock,
or heaven's fiery hail falling in Alaska,
too cold to actually burn, falling
as bits of charcoal and ash.

Closing Facebook

Millions of pages built
on a digital spine stitched
and glued together by ones
and zeroes—I can't read them all.
I'll skim over some, analyze
a few, but only return
to read a handful over and over.
A book of relationships and connections,
I get the point: stay in touch.
A book of the genealogy and genesis
of friendships, but does it merit the constant
thumbing through? I dip a corn chip
in salsa, look at the three sombreros
on the wall—they're all the same,
just different colors.
I glance across the table, past the chip bowl
and the two red water glasses:
she has her head down,
her eyes down,
her shoulders slouched down,
her whole figure collapsing
into ones and zeroes,
pouring into digital space.
I try to get in a word,
Hi. How are you? How's the family?
But she just nods and shrugs,
the head and shoulders barely lifting

beneath the gravity pulling them down.
She flips through page after page
of the book she'll never finish,
leaving me to eat another chip
and decide which sombrero
I'd like to wear:
the black one or the tan one or the grey one.

When They Come, I Hope They Find

my fishing hat and appreciate
each tally on the bill,
visit each of the lakes and dip their three-toed alien feet in the
water.

my guitar and pluck the D string first, finger the fretboard to
find it, to find
whatever they're looking for, notice the
tablature for Stairway to Heaven,
and wonder if I ever took the stairs.

my paints and brushes and touch up the
dark circles around their eyes, consider
painting lightning bolts on the outside
of their flying saucers, make signs to protest the invasion.

my hand in hers, bleached bones fused together with decay
and dust and time,
and wonder why, think about touch and theorize that we were
a blind species, one that touched to understand the world.

my heart and brain bits and run tissue
analyses, determine that they are just tissue,
that we were just tissue and bone,
and stand before the Invasion Committee to
say, It never existed. They were tissue
like we are. We will never know love

because they didn't; they couldn't.
They were just tissue.

us cradled around each other and as they leave, see how we all
died together,
and feel that how our bodies lie holding each other must
mean more
than they had thought, and come back millennia later sad to
see only dust—
no more bones, no more tissue, no more
heart and brain bits, no more feeling
like there is something more than body.

The Woman and The Girl

From "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway

The hills, the valley were long
and white, no shade and no trees
between two rails of the sun.
The warm shadow, a curtain made
of strings and bamboo beads to keep
out flies, sat and had taken off her hat
and put it on the table. It's pretty,
said the woman, white in the sun, the country brown and dry.
The girl looked at the bead curtain,
painted something on it,
called through the curtain.
The woman and the girl waited so
long like absinthe. The girl looked across
at the white coloring of skin, the warm
wind bead curtain. It's lovely, the girl said.
You know I love you.
The grain and trees along the banks beyond
the river were mountains.
The shadow moved and saw
through the trees, And we could have
all this and could make it more impossible.
The whole world—take it away.
Get it back. The girl looked across
at hills and valley,
I'd do anything for you.
The woman, the curtain put down

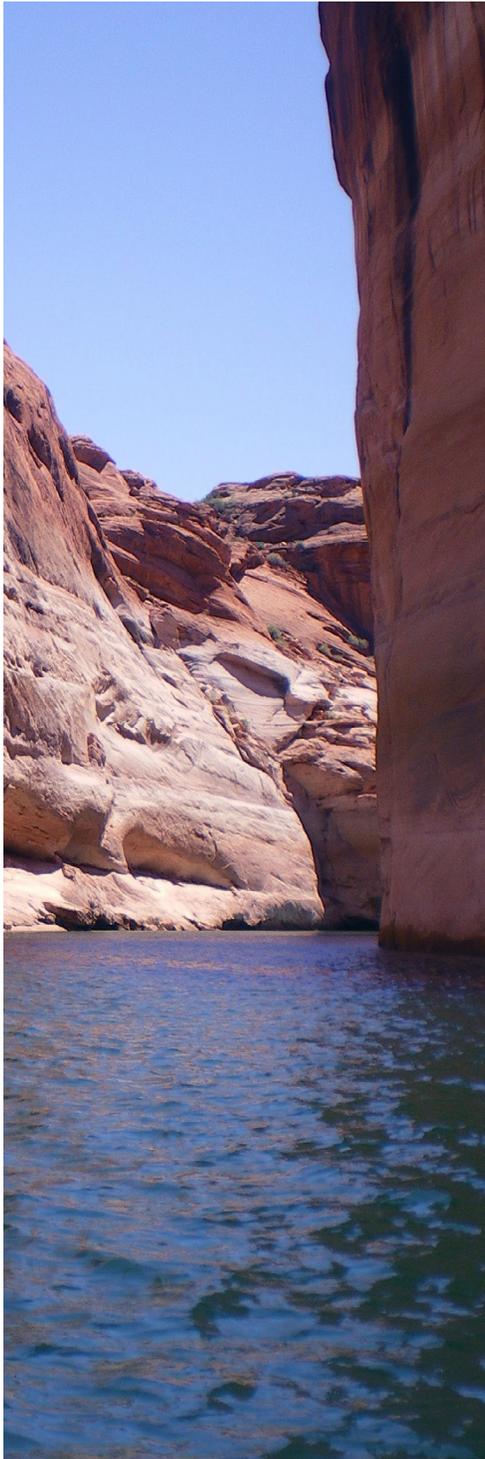
on damp felt pads,
picked up the two and carried them around,
looked up but could not see, and walked
where people were all waiting
for the bead curtain,
sitting at the table and smiling.
There's nothing wrong.



For the Comfort

I traded for them, black Nike shorts,
gave up the longboard that I had used
as a shield when friends jumped
from bushes and threw eggs at me.
I held that longboard up and felt in my hands
each white shell pop. I wore them on Sundays
after church, to relax in the dark and think
about God and faith. I wore them as light dawned,
speckling through blinds and onto carpet.
I wore them before my wife said, Those are hot,
before she even knew me and the creeping future
that I carried for us. I wore them and spray-painted
the proposal banner I attached to a kite
for the day I knelt on one knee, looking up.

Today I wear them; here on water cupped
in red rock hands, cradled in the sandstone ribs
of this valley. I will wear them as I wrap the fishing line
around my toe, pull my hat over my eyes,
and let sun and waves rock me to sleep.



Upon Waking

I woke to steak and eggs, a bowl of Cap'n Crunch and milk.
I woke to wind blowing across a red body dressed in blue silk,
dried skin beneath a desert sun—my skin and the red skin of baked rock.
I woke to the cuts of bass teeth on my sandpaper thumb, and the knock
of waves against the boat—the clock of this world, no second hand,
no hour hand, just rock, rock, rock. I woke to red, to rock, to sand.

The Girl on Main and 7th

Her hair is rivers.
Rivers are schools of fish.
Schools of fish are gallops
of horses stampeding. Gallops
of horses stampeding are droves
of jungle ants flowing like blood.
Her hair is rivers,
is schools of fish,
is gallops of horses stampeding,
is droves of jungle ants flowing like blood.
Her hair is babble, heaving, thunder, march;
her hair is water, scale, hoof, and pincer.

Mountain, Sky, Cloud

I believe in mountains and their power to humble.
I believe in the sky that wraps her arms around the world
to hold us and hide us from knowing the nothing of space.
I believe in clouds and their echoes, their wisps
where wind has herded them across the sky, their anger
in the empty blue above deserts, their shouts and applause
when they can give rain. I believe in mudslides, in lightning,
in dusk and dawn. I believe in glaciers, in thunder—so much
thunder, and the blue peak above.





How to Love

Love like a boy waiting on the porch with his newest football,
waiting for the sound of tires on the dirt road.

Love like a pig tail girl holding her sister's hand in the grocery store,
watching Mother put milk, bread, and cereal in the cart.

Love like the cow in the pasture, like the crow on a fence post,
like the fields stretching beside ditches.

Love like dirt and the sole, like chewing gum under chairs.

Love like juniper and piñon pine in the rain, like Navajo stone
on Kayenta raised up by Wingate cliffs.

Love like breathing.

Love like seeing and touching, like smelling and tasting,
like hearing the sound of life beat in the earth and wind.

Love like today is today, and tomorrow is heaven—there but not
really there.

Love like hugging each orphan, each widow, like shaking the hands
of the widower as he opens the wedding album.

Love like the daisies in a six-year-old's hands, placing them beside
the headstone.

Love like you're with him, with her, holding his hand, her shoulder
and not speaking.

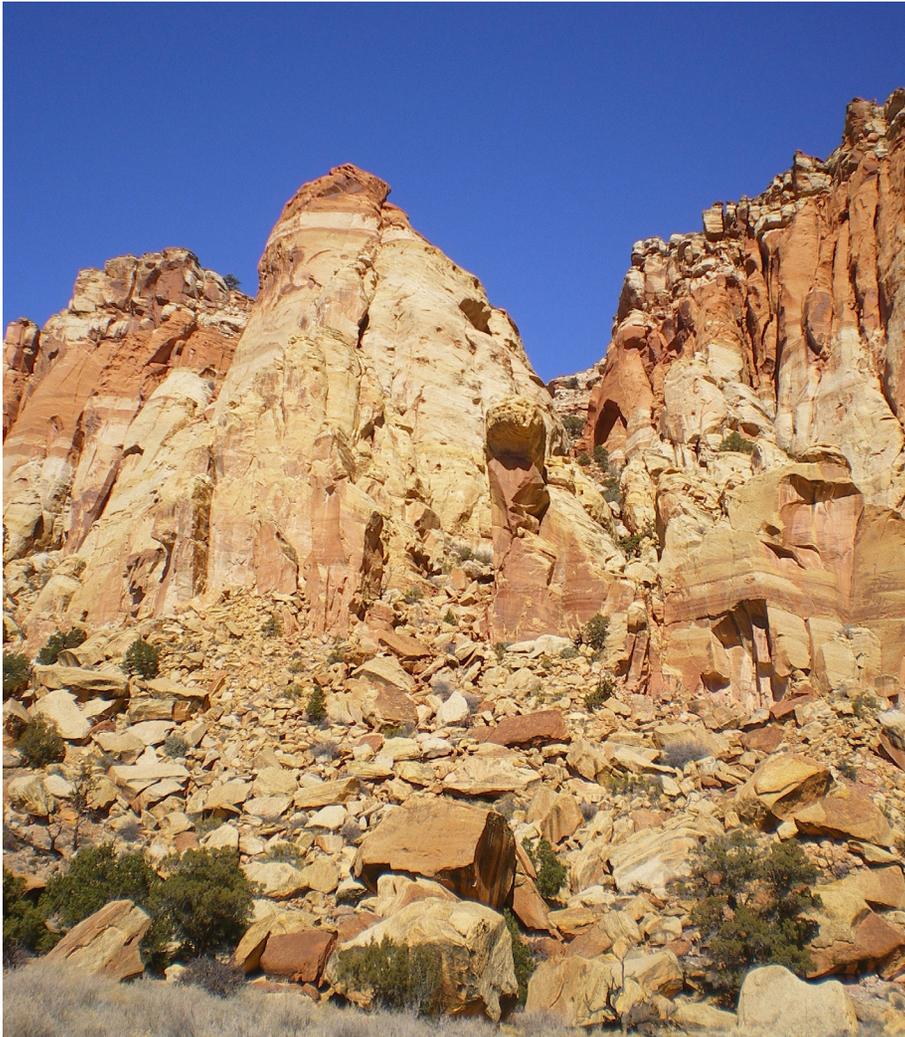
Love like the silence before and after.

The Farmer from Lake Powell

There once was a farmer from Lake Powell
who took up the rod and gave up the trowel.
The other farmers all laughed,
and his crops were all halved,
but he caught ten bass, then smiled and howled.

Premonition Won't Change a Thing

If I knew, would I feel the strain
to open the rib cage and let the heart
and lungs breathe, spend nights
in bed thinking to pedal the wheel of time
backwards? If a man in a black suit
and black tie touched my arm
as I sat on the curb, said, Don't,
would I know how regret grows inside out
and permanent like a weed that petrifies
too quickly to pull? Would I say, This is regret,
This longing is regret, This moment will be regret?
If I knew before, would the world change
or keep spinning with the weight of so many broken things?



On the Road and the World's Beauty

Fifteen miles north of Kanab, I asked, What are you, Beauty? A million years ago the earth heaved in response, lifting juniper-pocked red rock high.

I am Beauty.

The earth opened Navajo sandstone jaws to swallow
just enough iron to bleach the rock pink.

This is Beauty.

Scarred with steps and rungs where the earth said to the wind, Mold me, white
faces

lift stairs and ladders up for me to see and say, There is Babel; There is Jacob's
Ladder;

There is where angels hung pulleys and walked the City of Enoch to God;

There is Beauty.

Robert and the Cathedral

I'm blind so he takes
my hand with his, puts
the pencil in our hand,
and draws on a paper
bag. Show me, I say.
Show me Cathedral.
I see pillars and buttresses,
vaulted windows and ceilings,
wooden benches, and the cross
of it all. Close your eyes,
I say. Don't stop drawing.
We see the stone gargoyles
hunching over the edge,
the spires stabbing at the sky.
There it is, I say. I see it now.

She Made a Dress with Those Leaves

Pose. Tilt your head. Yes, just like that.
The photographer lifted his hand
and snapped. She looked, fiddling with her dress,
the withered leaves stitched together
with twine vines. Her feet played in the dirt,
her big toe drawing something
the photographer couldn't see.
And all the while, the stem by her foot pushed out leaves,
saying, Look. Look at her dress. You will be
dresses someday. You will clothe little girls
and they will finger your dried, dead veins.
They will say, Pretty. They will say, Beautiful. Look.

Endings

Endings need beginnings: the night needs a morning to darken, to drape and adorn with stars. And a morning needs a night to drag westward across the sky to the blanket box, folding back the dark blue quilt with starred knots and tucking it away until dusk. Death needs a newborn to babysit through adolescence and middle age into a wheelchair then a hospital bed. I needed the first poem to end this one. Lasts need firsts. Endings and beginnings are genealogies of moments birthing moments.