



*thrall*

POEMS

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## Geography

1.

At the bottom of the exit ramp  
my father waits for us, one foot  
on the curb, right hand hooked  
in the front pocket of his jeans,  
a stack of books beneath his arm.  
It's 1971, the last year we're still  
together. My mother and I travel  
this road, each week, to meet him —  
I-10 from Mississippi to New Orleans —  
and each time we pull off the highway  
I see my father like this: raising his thumb  
to feign hitchhiking — a stranger  
passing through to somewhere else.

2.

At Wolf River my father is singing.  
The sun is shining and there's a cooler  
of Pabst in the shade. He is singing  
and playing the guitar — the sad songs  
I hide from each time: a man pining  
for Irene or Clementine, a woman dead  
on a slab at Saint James. I'm too young to know  
this is foreshadowing. To get away from  
the blues I don't understand, I wade in water  
shallow enough to cross. On the bank  
at the other side, I look back at him as if  
across the years: he's smaller, his voice  
lost in the distance between us.

3.

On the  
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3.

On the Gulf and Ship Island Line  
my father and I walk the rails south  
toward town. More than twenty years  
gone, he's come back to see this place,  
recollect what he's lost. What he recalls  
of my childhood is here. We find it  
in the brambles of blackberry, the coins  
flattened on the tracks. We can't help it—  
already, we're leaning too hard  
toward metaphor: my father searching  
for the railroad switch. *It was here, right  
here*, he says, turning this way and that—  
the rails vibrating now, a train coming.

know

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