

## THREE POEMS

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*Charles Casey Martin*

### DEER BLIND

*For my father*

And the Lord God formed man  
of the dust of the earth . . .

—*Genesis II:7*

I

I've kept a gunstock I carved  
One spring for mornings  
When I can smell  
Its pine-bleeding sap, the wood  
Remembering to draw its rings  
Tight for winter  
The way a spayed bitch  
Sometimes fills with milk and blood.

So it must be for you, hearing  
Shotguns chase deer, repeat  
Songs an Okinawan sniper hummed  
In 1941: his bullet pinned  
Your hand to a tree—  
Another missed your brain,  
Drilling into mud, through years  
Of rotted jungle humus. Lodging,  
Perhaps, in the bone of an ice-age deer.

You told me about mumbletypeg:  
Your brothers in a circle,  
Pocketknives balanced nose down  
On knees, elbows, fingertips.  
Beginning with bare toes, you'd flick  
Your knives ten times, and each blade  
That failed to stick upright  
Drove a six-inch peg deeper

Into hard-packed clay. The last  
Throw was made from the tip  
Of the nose, staring  
Cross-eyed. The loser squatted,  
Hands behind his back, and found  
The buried peg with his teeth.

## II

Oaks leave acorns on snow  
Oakleaves over acorns  
Shade over leaves. As your stainless  
Blade guts an eight-point buck,  
A snapshot grays his blood, pins  
Your hand to a fencepost, leaves  
Oaks behind you out  
Of focus. Every gray-handed  
Shadow points away from the sun, east

Through timber to a mud road: a black  
Handbill on a fencepost and one  
Silver doe breathing  
White into a crosswind. Suppose time

Thawed this pasture, waded  
Its ditches, slipping through  
Barbed wire: the doe's breath  
Would darken and freeze in her throat.  
Pink eyes and nostrils  
Ice-glazed, hooves deep in sleet. Dead  
And patient for winter to die  
Behind farmhouses, on the cold  
North sides of Oaks where snow thaws last  
When spring unlocks the ground—

*Its worms and clover.*

## DOLLARS

*pass unnoticed  
home to home;  
interchangeable as faces  
of presidents*

(from a crossword)

*for sheila reynard*

i

an Angel told me  
we're given two lives

and in two's she said  
we spend them two

in difference in marriage two  
Black Angel black shadow

I'm in a city  
that's known so many poets

I use their elegies  
as streetmaps their poems

lead me to a graveyard lamp  
and a Black Angel they've taken

from you Angel  
these schoolboy poets

only to whisper behind your  
back just one friend

would send me to visit he said  
each of us is visited

by some inevitable sadness he was  
dressed all in black he named you

mother midnight  
Angel of Death and told me

not to be afraid  
to speak foolishly or to cry

because words  
like tears are part of a darker

misunderstanding      so tell me  
Black Angel

*death angel*  
how do I begin an elegy?

ii

in august an east windowseat's best  
on the northbound three p.m.      get by  
a pretty girl and hope a jap  
won't sit close      the driver's

left his uniform  
jacket to hide the steeringwheel  
from sun      cotton t-shirt  
left arm shades darker than the other  
he rolls a smoke in the coach's  
afternoon shadow

the centennial's queen of cotton  
is leaving the capital  
boarding the kerrville bus  
with a two dollar cash prize  
and sterling texas charmnecklace      on it  
her hometown is a pink

rhinestone      *she's blind*  
but don't worry      this is 1945  
the cottonfields are full      the war  
is almost over      and a farmer  
up the aisle will offer watermelon  
and ride with her as far as  
the next city

iii

waco hours later  
an hour late      warbond  
posters taped inside depot windows  
newstand monthlies headlining  
*peace*      the cotton queen

breaks her two dollar bill  
for a glossy atlas and joins a g.i.  
who pays for a book of crosswords  
and a ticket north      *his change*  
*is two dollars*  
*even*      the g.i. reads from the atlas

whose poor description  
is like west texas scenery      they unfold  
the map and using its legend  
and the length of a fingerjoint  
measure in inches  
the miles they've come      through the sleeve

of her summer cotton dress  
the g.i. glimpses the girl's breast  
blonde as the khaki uniforms  
she folds all day  
in a freedom factory      *a sniper learns*

*to aim for a jap's third uniform button  
but misses if he remembers  
that death's not impersonal  
like a boy's desire to touch  
the breast of a homesick girl*

*a two dollar bill  
a silver necklace  
a boy's hand on a breast*

the bill is a symbol for silver  
for the girl's sadness  
that will return when the soldier  
leaves her

iv

the driver's shirt  
is the color of diesel and mustard  
the bus now rests for repairs  
at a roadside farmers' mkt  
the girl buys apples and promises  
a real supper in dallas  
*less than a dollar left* she thinks  
testing the edges  
of her coins with a thumbnail  
the g.i. lends her  
two      *a lazy silver*

*bomber flies innocent  
circles over the airfield  
at ft worth      and from a dallas*

bar the g.i. dials long distance  
with a finger in his ear      it's the third

finger of his left hand and the cotton  
queen cries by the jukebox she's cashed  
her two dollar loan for nickels  
and asks the waitress  
*punch another loud one* the g.i.

buys cheeseburgers-to-go  
and a half-pint *out of five*  
says the waitress *twenty-five*  
*fifty three* and the bill  
the two dollar bill comes back

tomorrow  
the cotton queen takes a train  
east to texarkana the g.i. says  
he'll catch an early plane now

he parts two strands of barbed wire  
for the girl and her suitcase  
they'll spend tonight in this field  
crickets  
and the dew that wets her back  
tell the blind girl it's night  
the g.i. describes the moon to her  
as a bottlecap in asphalt

but the night is moonless  
and he lies again  
when she asks *will I see you*  
*you'll go if I sleep you will*  
*I'll bet*

*I'll bet two dollars*

v

she wakes because of the way she slept  
in a sunburned cottonfield  
a leg folded under her bodyweight  
the busdriver with a fresh  
t-shirt and shave this morning  
reads that the war has ended  
a silver bomber flew  
over a country that's impersonal to him  
hard to imagine  
like anything a blind girl  
can't touch she gave something

last night to a soldier  
who told her he'd stay  
who's flying now over a cottonfield  
that he can't separate from other  
uniform shapes of field

leaving dallas  
the busdriver sees  
in a cottonfield a pink  
sunburned girl standing naked  
who was as pale before today  
as florescent factory walls

*she can't see pink*  
but she can feel her stinging  
shoulders thighs  
even eyelids  
and all of her is pink

except for a tiny mapshape on a breast  
where her silver necklace slept

vi

in cities  
educated men are ending  
important elegies and still  
I haven't said a word about death

or a woman who wasn't  
blind a poet so I return

to my Black Angel the night  
is moonless and her lamp

is blind  
perhaps someone threw a stone

you're alone tonight Angel  
where's your sister gone a rock flew

at a streetlamp and took her  
the part of you I knew best

I lost someone too when she died  
she gave something it flew I pretend

her soul is round like the face  
of a coin or clock but hollow on one

side to ride the wind (I know  
this is the soul's shape  
because I raised my hand  
in church and asked and was passed  
the soul of a saint a wooden saucer  
deafened the fall of the coin I gave) Angel  
the poor say  
that greed is the moment  
that hasn't time or strength enough to hold  
a blessing and kiss for each possession  
death I think is the same to the  
living a moment like birth  
too full to carry itself longer giving  
into something else something new  
*when young poets die  
the words they would have used  
survive as when lovers go  
they're given each to spend  
the unshared balance of the other's love*

BLUEBONNETS: *Last Words*

All things claimed by barbed wire  
On this lonely farm-to-market road  
Become individual  
In the slow progress of dawn  
Like tiny, purplish wildflowers  
In a sun-burned Texas meadow.

I remember ivory colored dominoes  
And my grandmother's hands  
Shuffling  
For another game of forty-two. For her,  
Life was just this:  
Face down

Equal values at both ends.