

Beggar · *George Angel*

BENEATH AN OAK TREE. In the shadow of it, the cool of it, there he lay. Manuel, my poor Manuel. He had learned nothing in his life, and I loved him. The bees buzzed around his open mouth, so they told me. What did they want from me, a cry for justice? No, you see, because I had learned.

The yellow sky drops its leaves upon the ground. Lying on the side of a hill getting drunk like a beggar, by myself, in peace. We are all of the ground and to have been something is to make a little jump. The afternoon is long and turning. I have not been reduced to rags. I am alone with the snakes and birds. I tell you I am talking as fast as I can. What might you teach me now? His hand grasping I have seen already. Would you fill my mouth with blood? All rock retains the taste of skin. He told them and they have not learned either, when they put the ax into his head and I put his body into the ground with the echo of his voice: this is my land.

The breeze whistles dirty songs to my husband's corpse. The butterflies and moths mock the leaves. I shot the horse they gave him with his father's rifle because I did not know then that I didn't need to. The tall grass knows the language of fallen things. The old woman watches her legs dangle in the water.

If you want to know anything you need to dig into the ground. Babbling, and who would deny me this. I have become water. He went to them and showed them paper, and they turned into paper men and he was writing on them but they said nothing. The garlands of falling—I can't seem to remember a single song to sing now. The twisted rope tastes bitter (he is almost here) and my tongue turns over. The house is away somewhere and all its windows and doors are open. Mosquitos rest on the sheets hanging outside and nothing will dry because there is nothing in my sleep that I might give to anyone. Learning not to sleep but to talk over rooftops, the tall grass erasing with my talk as I talk. Up above the trees, on this hill they have covered with cow shit and the holes from their hooves, that cracked the husband of a woman who did not know he was only a porcelain doll.

I ask that you teach them slowly when it comes time for them to learn, that they might always remember it and always be learning it. Not my

hand, since I have learned, and his father's rifle is at the bottom of a stream under the sand and flakes that are gold lies. I am not as large as a tree nor as ruthless as a man. I talk when I would sing the silence of memory.

I am isolated by the silence of my chattering words. This might give you some idea, loud and stupid and of no use to the field, the one bird moving. The bead of sadness has been pulled up out of me into the branches of the spread tree. It lingers there, like moisture at morning over flesh that is all pigs' flesh with its voice like a gold ring, spending it on itself through its nose, where it hangs. Gold light on water, gold leaf on water, gold boots giving a dull sound against each other in the sand at the bottom of bitterness.

It rains the impossibility of howling in a swirling without direction I see in the impenetrable blue that becomes smudged soon along the edges. I am within and he is within me. It has taken me a long time and I have been taught it without mercy, but I am within and even you must someday come to me.

I am tired because I have been folding all the leaves, and the moths are furious and night, hireling night, will crush me and use the fine meal of me sprinkled in water to reflect the blind stars.

But please don't give me such a stupid face. You know quite well why I am talking to you. I am finished and blown off the branch with the yellowing year. Trampled beneath gold hooves. But I am holding this lost world, and you will have nothing of it. You are merely my errand boy. It rolls within me and sings. All your fires are spent on the swarm that crawls over you. My world will burn with an older fire. Its cinders will have wings to rise and then be gone. So your leaving means nothing. Remember. I send you out into the world, dead god, to prepare the way for my little child of straw.