

THE
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A Footnote for Quixote

I am reading *Don Quixote* again,
reading the part again where Sancho Panza wakes
to thieves stealing his donkey in the badlands of La Mancha.
He weeps. He weeps into his sombrero,
crushing it in his fists,
the tubes of straw fold and mash
in sharp bright elbows,
and the knight says nothing of importance,
and for thirty pages, Sancho's wisdom burns
like bruises on beaten feet,
and then, the donkey is there again:
not returned or rescued but there:
a sudden saddle, a sudden rump, a braying hump
under the warty buttocks of the fat squire,
wine-breathing with the taste for laughter.
It is as if, doused in desire and set alight,
one-handed Cervantes forgot the thieves,
forgot Sancho's rage, forgot it all
for his wish for the other hand
cut away into another history:
a wish for *handedness*,
which was the wish for the donkey,
balking in the badlands of his mind,
and like the rarest bird under the shade of ash trees
the beast came back to him,
flapping into his ear in a word,
and Cervantes wrote the word,
and again Sancho was seated,
and again the donkey was a wide seat of happiness.

Once, ass ears smoldered in me,
hoofs clacked, wings rang from within
but were not wings at all,
but a braying climbing into being
and being inside my father's voice

as he saddled me up on his shoulders
and we pranced in the Spanish twilight
of the even-standing fences,
and he brayed more than once.
It was this that was stolen from me:
shadows left in a room of aprons,
suits mailed with boxes of shoes,
my mother silencing a table by being silent
at a table, and the dull sun on a foggy day
is how I remember the theft:
a voice across three thousand miles,
and like Sancho and his donkey,
like Cervantes and his handedness,
like a boy lost in the badlands of plaster walls
I could not say why.
At fourteen, all I could do was open
the worn high school spine
and read those pages for the first time,
their margins scribbled with a picaresque of names
of all who'd come before me.
It was Quixote who taught me to change
and so I dyed my bangs the color of sunset,
their cropped hairs ridged against an earring's zinc-studded A.
I crashed to the mosh pit's strobes
in saw-cut boots, spray-paint shirts,
and you tell me who was more quixotic than I?
more knight and squire, squire and knight than I?
with my cheek-pierced partner, Wade Brian Scanio?
our faces each the new wineskin bruise of the other
in that, or any California, unimportantly near the sea.

Nights, his voice dry and close with bourbon,
Wade's old man would chase us from the house,
but once he went farther:
out on the lawn, over the fans of sprinklers,
his revolver snapped twice in his hands,
and he called his son's full name.
We ran, and I kept running,