

## Jack, Neal, and a '49 Hudson

*after a linocut by Marc Snyder*

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In the last year of the first half of the Modern century, Mao, the khaki emperor, was entering Beijing; Salinger was finishing *Catcher in the Rye*; Ginsberg was on the roof beginning to *Howl*. My father was walking away from the punch press at Republic Steel in Cleveland and driving off, a company man, in his first company car, to have lunch in Pittsburgh with a client where they would talk bolts and golf over cocktails and steaks. My lace-curtain, West Side Irish mother was in her eighth month, waddling with me, with my year-and-a-half-old brother in tow, catching his breath.

In Detroit, 180 miles or so north, a '49 Hudson was rolling off the automobile assembly line, its odometer at zero, an open-mouthed "O," marveling at the new highway system that Jack and Neal would drive in it, a Post-Modern Holy Trinity going coast-to-coast, over and over, because they could, because it was not about having or even about being, it was just about moving, their lust for wandering never satisfied, sighs and laughter like exhaust emitted into the air of the high-octane world into which I was being born, gasping for breath.

## Red House

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The door is red. You stand silent, one hand holding the other. The house is made of stones. Your hands are vines groping. The number of years you dwelt upon the threshold is larger than the sum of your memories.

Your mouth, a portal. Your body, the key. The door is red. You lean on the doorjamb, your forehead against the oak which is harder than the choices you have been given. For years, you dreamed of windows. The house is made of loans.

The house is made of bones. Your voice, the key to open the lock. Your eyes are widening. The door is red. The number of times you've told yourself lies then denied them is thicker than the door.

Your body, a door. Your life, a house. There are other houses, other doors. You stand on the top step, fitting the door frame better than you fit your former life. The door is red.

Your body is red. Your life is made of bones. Lean into the door, step into yourself, through yourself, out of yourself. Your dreams are eyes. Your eyes are windows.

The door is red and your life is a key. Open your mouth. Use your voice.

## Murder of Metaphors

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How the world's surface ripples with misconceptions, misreadings.

How we imagine what is real by picking a card from the hand's spread of realities.

How analogies make abstractions dress for success, address each audience, redress disparities.

How the difference between ignorance and prejudice is a choice of educations: leaving the classroom, its books stacked on the desk, or entering the father's room, its flag and willow switch in the corner.

How weight sits lightest on those who won't listen.

How we find ourselves caught in a run of clubs or situated among perspectives, like the seven surrounded by diamonds.

How where we stand dictates the objects we hold in our hands: guns or words.

## White Hotel

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They wore white linen suits.

They laughed like water in a mountain stream.

They ate veal in what used to be a medieval monastery, unaware of how the vaulted ceilings and arched windows absorbed all conversation.

They found themselves astounded to find it took the peasants three generations to build the abbey.

They discussed how the monks used to sing Alleluias in this very room.

They shook their heads upon learning novices were required to sleep on rope beds in unadorned cells.

They read in their brochures that actual historical figures once walked these same streets.

They lifted their glasses, the white wine clear as spring water.

They liked the way the table candles lighted their faces.

## Box of Light

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Joseph Cornell lived on Utopia Parkway. Walking the sidewalk, he filled his pockets with recyclable oddities and fragments of moonlight. Arriving home, he affixed them lovingly into little wooden boxes: rooms of their own poetics.

We're on our way to the Hotel Utopia. Our socialist and anarchist friends sleep there like found art in the small rooms with the inclusive balconies. They rent for a sonnet when breathing and politics are twins. Just past the lobby is Lefty's Bar & Grill. We drink to labor and art, talk louder than the atomic jukebox. Porters on draft and stout in the cooler are what the struggle tastes like.

After the revolution, stop by. We'll raise our glasses and sing along with Woody Guthrie or the Sierra Leone Refugee All Stars. The rooms still use metal keys that sleep in the hammock of a pocket and parking is free. How many stars, you ask? We're all stars at the Hotel Utopia.