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from The Labyrinth: An Essay in Seven Movements

1

Under gnarled cedars the pencil company
spared a century ago, along my barrier island's

northern marsh, an anole—

its pinkish throat-fan scarred and
about furred—chewed a wasp in its toothlessness,

citronella warned the skeeters not to land,

oyster shells were heaped as trash.
And you, Minotaur, reclined there on my seventies couch.
Flatly I said the word “father,” asked

you to free-associate:

breeding me sasquatch

if u can't be a pious boy I won't see u

hack away cocoon

he-man deathwatch

he's leaving me bs!

raw poke true

*cause it felt gooooood adam4 the violets of five
seasons reappear—*

“Now stop. Tell me—”

gobbledygook

“—STOP IT!—a dream in which your poppa flies.”
Blue seeds were falling on us from the trees.
You, of all beings, were about to cry.

*my poppa was a stupid tiny horse in too tiny of a cage
he sat on a lettuce bed like a friggin sphinx where his
mane shoulda been were AIDS ribbons shrimp tails*

*“put ur hand through the bars” he said “push the water
bowl closer to my mouf” it psyched me out my arms
wouldn’t move I couldn’t talk or gulp “it’ll all be ok” he
said all girly “fire up the stove and grease a pan I’ll lay
three eggies and roll em toward—”*

His hands suddenly reddened and cracked

like my mother’s. Dad’s mustache crept across his face.
To the inkblot I held up, he said *those bones*

*r ur hips when u were a baby and he traced
them with his uh his moist—*

“That’s quite enough,” I said and hastily
closed my notebook. “Our session is over.”

but u wanna be my matador? he asked, sitting up.

“I wouldn’t hurt a patient, ever;

once you’re healed, be my friend.” He bit his lip
with his front molars—brown, rotting—and growled,

un-possible! In his rage he would’ve gnawed at his

face if he could have, at the mussel shells
stuck to his shaggy chest, circling his tattoos:

a sparrow, a finned H-bomb, and a bluebell

all orbiting a purple star within a horseshoe.

“Please?”—though a man,
I spoke in a boy’s voice, not a shrink’s.
Carpenter bees bored holes

into fallen cedar branches.
The marsh grass rustled.

*kill me, kill me! before
I cut u good*

Then in a voice I knew to be
a royal eunuch's,
I said, "I don't want to die."

so kill me now

I cleared my throat
of self: "All I have is my heart—and bare

hands too small for my body."

lame!

"Then how?"

u sing me a dream u can't shake

"I remember huge thumbtacks pinning me
high up on a cork wall. Below, Dad wore a
butterflied cow carcass with puffy-paint graffiti

on it. His girl-ape with a long giraffe neck
gripped an orange biohazard box. 'Hold still,'
Dad called to me as the baboon scampered up

with a syringe of his infected blood. My left
forearm, when pricked, twitched like horse
skin—there was screaming, whimpering, then

laughing non-stop, party streamers, ice-cream
cake from Baskin-Robbins. 'I want a better
relationship with you,' he called up to me.

'Now you have the key to the Kingdom.'"

ur tacked-up jesus dream didn't murder me

*but the monkey was cool so yeah move
a cape toward my face and*

force me to u stab me between my shoulders

“Uh, you don’t really have a body.”

*one day real soon I’ll pop up before u
u’ll think I’m a buddy*

3

Another vision
or something: my father limping after me
in a hedge maze.

He holds a double-headed ax.

“Boy!

Boy! I’m coming!” he yells, distant, unseen.

(Once I scattered his
expense reports
across the floor.)

He calls out to the night,
which is also a boy, “I’m behind you.”

I step backwards
into my deep tracks in the snow
and the camera pans with me;
leap to the side, the script says, brush away
your traces;
I disobey,

falling back to make a snow angel
till I’m winging
against gravel,
which tears
my puffy jacket, and he’s found me—

“Daddy,” I say,
“I love you more than—”

4

Then I woke thirdway through my life
standing on that island again

north of Jacksonville's sprawl;

and I began to walk, pretty much alone. Others—
my mother, all the men I've ever kissed—

were ahead, groaning,
on a beach of dead horseshoe crabs,

so many we couldn't see sand.
We didn't know where to go.

No choice but to step on the carapaces.

6

Demon, daemon, unruly
taskmaster, why so quiet tonight? A hero never stabbed you in the throat.

Never cut off your starry,

horned head and dashed to the escape skiff to raise its black, tattered
sail. Was that you in the monastery's grazing field far away

from here, when I peeled off my blue-tinted contacts? Then the boy and
the calf he rode

blurred into a single beast; I didn't notice his slingshot

till a pebble nearly put out my eye. Like John Wayne and his stud,
they'd zoomed, between the two basalt shrines, to rush at me. When he
dismounted

and leaned against the temple wall, no difference, none at all,

among him, me, and stone. I put on my smudged glasses, the unity fell
away—I crossed my eyes, and it almost returned. Nearby,

novice monks in their maroon underwear passed a rattan ball

back and forth with their heads and feet, so carefully, as if it were the world. In that sacred—really?—field were you

with us, bull-man? And in the other

fields, where a bullet

was too costly so they made do with the handle of a shovel? You rage

and thrash within,
seven billion of us at your bidding.

Snorting, trying to bite your own ears, you can't be ridden like a centaur,
the one I imagine galloping across

a burning dooryard of lavender, lilac, though you'll ride us off into—

*shut ur trap
tall pansy
u no Athenian—*

Shut yours, cow-troll! You aren't my soul, my mo—

*Duke no Dante
with a cocky
ghost guide*

*lie back chug
the beefy pho
from ur douchebag*

*canteen floss
ur pearly yellows
rest in my bed-*

*lam rock out
with my talkin
worm we*

*likey anguish
risk grub slowly
now slowly—*

Enough of your “slowly, slowly.” You’re just barely bipedal.

*ur nothing
without me
love’s dirt*

*tight blindfold
cage—*

I can love purely—

*caw for me
like a crow
baked alive—*

even if it’s only the passion vines and Grandpa Ott’s morning glories on the fence, or the plum tree, its prunes in the brown grass—

*ur shit
faggot
ur dead*

7

Body of lust,
body of fear,

what you imprison’s
wilder, more precious

and ridiculous
than I can say.

Fall away,
fall away.