

**GREG WRENN**

**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 goooooood 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.