

**A GREAT
NEW WAVE
HESPERIAN
DEATH HORSE**

Jacob Russell Dring

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Overture

A Great New Wave Hesperian Death Horse's title was taken from a fleeting lyric I won't name here. This story is not about the song or the band or even the music in which it originated. No, this story is about two people who are, literally, crazy in love. This is an anomalous narration of their downward spiral, which they see as a summit to climb, into madness and chaotic glory.

Abel and Tara are the protagonists just as much as they are the antagonists. Call them antiheroes if you wish. Call them fools enrapt in their emotions and this maelstrom engulfing them called life.

*See and feel the world and Tara
Through Abel's eyes.*

*See and feel the world and Abel
Through Tara's eyes.*

Experience it through your own.

* * *

Some of my greatest stories are written on whims. Perhaps this is among them. I improvised everything and finished after roughly fourteen hours' writing time across the span of five days. I was neither rushed nor did I rush the writing process. I knew it would be a short endeavor, but in the long run it would bear its own depth.

May you enjoy it as I have written it.

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A Great New Wave Hesperian Death Horse || Dring

01

Their canvas has always been
An abstract one whose colors bleed and weep
Shades that don't mix well still fare
Forming tones never before concocted

*Tara's eyes are onyx
There's a gleam in them just for me
She tells me I'm all hers
Without ever parting lips
And the way her hair cascades
Pale skin behind curtains of black
Those eyes lurking
Those eyes always on the hunt*

*Abel's gaze seldom falters
His hands are on the wheel
And I can tell they'd much rather be on me
I hold him in my eyes and I know
He can see his reflection*

*Without the aid of sunlight
Which is glaring right at him, over me
He lets nothing come over us*

The road is a stretch of gray
Stippled with yellow lines extending beyond
The horizon is to their right
Peering through strips of cloud
Spilling its viscera through the sky
A fiery glow washed over the Barracuda
Windows down, breeze keeping to itself
Hours of sailing across the asphalt
And more hours ahead of them, yet
No hands for time, nor eyes
Just the rising and sleeping of daylight

*It's always an array of colors
When I'm caught in her gaze
And even with the sun at her back
Haloing Tara like some twisted angel
It's as if nighttime has seized the cabin
The wind enveloping the Barracuda
Does not affect my woman's hair
Straight mambas veiling her face
And those eyes, her eyes never leaving mine
And the road, the road I could care less about*

“Say we crash right now?”
Tara's voice slithers through the air
“Won't be any different” Abel replies
Digging his gaze deeper into hers
“Than?” she inquires
“Standing still with you”
Their hands join over the console

Between the bucket seats
 Fingers interlace, palms together
 As if they were made for each other
 As if they were made for nothing else
 Except to bridge the gap between each other

*Our hands squeeze
 But it is not a necessity
 There is never a gap between us
 The air I breathe
 Is a gift from her lungs
 And I know she feels the same*

Abel's foot grows heavy on the accelerator
 Tires screech briefly but neither of them hear it
 The Barracuda sears down the road
 Waves break on sand somewhere to their right
 The horizon hangs over an expanse of ocean
 It is a beautiful day out
 And it is no less beautiful inside
 Although their destination is not the beach
 Their schedule can definitely invite it

*Ocean spray on my skin
 It's like I can feel it from here
 Wafting through the autumn air
 Kissing me on the lips, brine
 Not the same flavor as Abel's
 Nothing could ever suffice
 But it soothes me yet
 And I know we could make gold
 From the fawn sand beneath us
 Whatever the shade of sky
 Be it a quilt of stars above us*

*Or a vast blue ceiling
Blessed to have us writhing below
I know we could make the sea
Wish it had a heart and feet*

Tara doesn't need to voice her thoughts
Abel was born clairvoyant to her
He hugs both lanes
Filleting the car with yellow lines
And forcing any passersby to the shoulder
Unless crashing is just as appealing
To them as it is to Abel and Tara

*Saturation is something of the excess
And we are connoisseurs for more
Make us wetter than before
Water is the thinnest of substances
Natural but inferior to us
However we won't decline the offer*

"Wanna take a swim?" Abel asks
A sly smile creeping across his face
"You read my mind" Tara grins
Her teeth are the only white features
Blaring at Abel inside the car
Although this doesn't go to say that
Her eyes are not radiant
"Do you have your bikini?"
"No, remember? I got blood on it in Murdoch"
Abel smiles, remembering "Oh, yeah
So you let loose to it in the wind"
They share a chuckle that turns into a laugh
It spreads like wildfire on their lips
And the conflagration flares inside of them

They need the ocean now more than ever
 Before the seats catch fire
 And the Barracuda melts into the pavement
 Who's to say they'd even notice

*I remember it as if it were yesterday
 Although in all honesty it might've been
 With no teller of time
 It might as well have been a week ago
 Or an hour before we last slept
 Whenever that was—*

*Tara is zoning out
 There is no finer way to put it
 Her eyes meander
 And the paths before them weave
 Latticework in the air
 Trying to recount a memory
 Or simply recalling time
 That thing which eludes us so often
 Regardless, she's in deep thought
 It's such a beautiful sight
 A stranger might think
 She has let down her guard
 But as I know, Tara never lets it down
 She was born with it fixed
 In the upright position
 Born, yes, when was that—*

The couple sit in the silence
 Of their own quizzical ruminations
 The memory involves the two of them
 So it never truly dips in amnesia
 However, the path to recollection

Is pocked with scenery impossible to ignore
Even if it takes hours of minutes to recall
When in reality it hadn't been—

*Murdoch, wherever that is
A small town distant in the rearview
Ablaze with our taillights
And the fireball Abel licked the sky with
I remember screams
Fueled by terror, wrought with awe
The people were unsure how to feel
But Abel and I had far less hesitation
Our emotions keep our veins venomous
With every step, ever squeeze of the trigger
Every laugh, every tear, every thrust
Every bead of sweat and particle of passion
The columns of smoke
And that palatable stench of hot brass*

*I feel the air spall
As Tara crosses the console
And latches onto me
A lemur leaping from limb to limb
Legs and arms grappling
Hugging for its dear life
This is what the inept lemur does
However the experienced are nimble
And so is Tara
I hardly feel her impetus collide
But the air has receded
And our lips are a parity
We kiss with our eyes open
Because we don't want to lose sight
Of everything we've fought so hard*

*To keep, to cherish, to share
 Besides, the darkness
 Is no home for souls like ours*

The Barracuda swerves
 A passing station wagon lays on the horn
 Practically run off the road
 But the lovers in the cabin are unfazed
 A rip-roaring Hemi under a black hood
 Drowns out most exterior sounds
 Meanwhile, within, heartbeats and breaths
 Are louder than any V8 could ever be
 Much less the squeaking of leather
 And abrading skin
 The soft and the calloused
 Two spirits of the smoothest coarseness
 Embracing until there is little left to share
 At least, in the space provided

02

*Every time we kiss, I swear
I'm taken someplace else
I cannot put a thumbtack to a map
But I know it isn't here
And it definitely isn't there
It's a world of untouchables
Where glass rips
And clothes shatter*

*I love this life
The turmoil and the carnality
Fast cars and loud guns
Swimming in his gaze
And drowning him in mine
But often the urge will surface
To reel me into the heart of it all
No, not the eye of the storm
But the epicenter, ground zero
So instead of asking
I'll bridge our lips, lungs*

*Hearts and souls
Take us there myself
Albeit not without his help*

Abel has been driving the Barracuda for
Awhile now
He feels like it's been years
He has always preferred American muscle
It is an extension of himself
But this beauty, it isn't his own
He borrowed it
From someone who no longer needed it
Not too long ago
Whenever that had been
Cast into clouds of tire smoke
And surely painted in more dire colors
Nonetheless, she trusts his drive
The fuel poisoning his veins
Is as much a form of bliss
As it is a fluidic acid
One palatable at the tip of his tongue
Smeared across her lips
Whenever they share a kiss
Or anything more
So it is no wonder her comfort level
They could be in a stolen Pinto
And she wouldn't mind
Hanging halfway out the window
While he redlines and the engine billows

*Tara has a way with words
Her tongue works wonders
Speech is poetry in mute form
Music flowing from lips*

*Ambrosia in saliva and voice
 We're running parallel to the shore
 Upon which we're sure to implore
 Both of our greatest fantasies
 The requests of skin and fire
 A journey branching from our itinerary
 Whose main destination is undetermined
 Nonetheless a venture of the best scenery
 We'll enjoy every patch of asphalt
 Every bucket seat of leather
 Every busted dashboard clock
 Every slap of wind to the face
 Every drop of blood and gobbet of sweat*

Tara's right leg is protracted
 Jutting through the passenger's window
 Ankle resting on the side-view mirror
 Bare toes wiggling in the breeze
 Black tanktop snug
 Denim shorts shy of underwear
 The air is September temperate
 Her skin relaxes by itself
 Wearing only Abel's gaze
 And the fingertips of her own
 Nails close to skin but not aligned
 Upon her sole is that briny spray
 Misting the air even from afar
 Tara's avid to feel it swallow her body
 Take she and Abel into its bowels
 And from there they can drown
 They can drown for all she cares
 They're drowning no less every day
 And it's soothing and beautiful and jagged
 It's of liquid knives and bullets and gunblast

Like leaves drifting through the sky
 Singed at the edges
 For reasons unknown
 With a mind that doesn't care to ask
 Because the answer would do no good
 Because nothing can ruin this
 Even as it smolders in ruins

*Tara's half reclining
 And half flying out of the window
 The horizon is surely painting the car
 In a peculiar distortion of colors
 Turning the lime green an odd purple
 Orange and yellow and red
 Quite a backdrop for Tara
 Her gaze drifts through the windshield
 Out the open frame to her right
 Through which she extends her leg
 Long, slender, perfect skin
 As white as my knuckles
 When we're making love
 In the heat of the cold night
 It's too bad it's this way—
 I'm driving and she isn't—
 Tara can latch onto me at any point
 Knowing I'll keep the wheels on pavement
 But I cannot as easily do the same
 Which is why my foot grows heavier now
 And the sound of breaking waves
 Is beginning to splinter our sound barrier*

The Barracuda tears down the road
 Its orange needle passing the eight and zero
 Thick Goodyear tires adhering to asphalt

Voicing themselves when under stress
Abel drives with energy, avidity
He'll crash the car if he needs to
He'll crash the car right into the ocean

*I look over at Abel
And he turns to catch my eyes
Knowing that they're upon him
Before ever turning his head
I ask him not to slow down
But speed up, go faster, I say
No, I demand it of him
Without my tongue lashing voice
I say this and he grins
We laugh together
Two banshees lost in vigor
Found only in passion
And Abel punches the accelerator
I can't imagine nothing short of fire
Yeah, a trail of fire behind us
As we make way for the ocean
And surely even it couldn't put us out
Hell, we'd like to see it try*

Asphalt shivers under rubber
Yellow paint peels and screams
Over four-hundred horses roar, not neigh
As Abel's foot becomes an anvil
Left hand clutching the wheel
This is a ship and he's the captain
Except there is no rudder, just an energy
And his right hand is on Tara's left leg
Fingers grappled to thigh
Tara bites her lower lip

The Hemi V8 causes the vehicle to tremor
 And the quake doesn't spare either of them
 Abel's teeth chatter in his skull
 Tara's skin vibrates
 Their view on the world before them
 Distorted and beautiful

*I feel like kicking the windshield out
 Prop something between the wheel and pedal
 Take Abel's hand in mine
 Mount the roof and scream together
 Laughing like lightning
 Until the wheels are pointing skyward*

The road curves for once in awhile
 A route from drag strip to sinuous
 Abel handles it professionally
 Without an hour's worth of training
 He never sways in his seat
 Tara is however pendulous, chuckling
 And Abel is not without a grin
 But before long their path ruptures
 A bridge ahead, water tower surveying
 Probably a small town
 (Like Murdoch?)
 Though tires screech prior to bridge
 Abel's gaze sweeps a boardwalk
 And foot transfers to brake
 Barracuda spins, blurring reality
 Cycling through panoramas

*I howl, exhilaration seizing me
 My leg still out the window
 Right palm to the dashboard*

*Left suddenly in Abel's
Our gazes paint together
Until the Barracuda lurches to a stop
Chassis rocking on wheels
Both of us swaying in our seats now
Even when everything placates
The air is still storming around us*

“Last to the ocean is the first to get wet”
Abel's voice spills from his lips
Like the Energizer Bunny on crank
And just as fast he's out the car
Without ever opening the door
Six feet tall with some change
And he slips through the window
Without an instant's worth of error
Shedding his shirt before reaching sand
Shoes off at the boardwalk
Soles impervious to splinters
This is the only time he doesn't mind
Risking Tara out of his sight

*Abel's dynamism fuels me
I slip through my window like him
Bare feet on the hot asphalt
I hear a sizzling but feel ocean spray
Abel turned the car off before leaving
Yet left it in the middle of the right-hand lane
Obliquely parked, windows down
We'll get to it when we're done
Yeah, when we're done we'll get it back*

“You're slow, girl!” Abel barks
He bounds off the end of the boardwalk

Ignoring the provided steps
 Feet plummeting into sand
 Leaving behind prints just for Tara
 Nobody else could ever fill them

*I feel the ocean before I see it
 But when my eyes behold
 I feel the waves unseen
 Crashing through and over me
 Misting the air I breathe with brine
 Hook in cheek, reel me in
 Her hand in mine, soon, pull me down
 I don't need oxygen to survive
 I only require the depths and her*

*I see Abel leap above a breaking wave
 Sideways, sprawled out in midair
 Like a shark clearing the surface
 And as soon as my feet touch the sand
 Grains ravaging my toes
 And nibbling at my soles
 Abel lands on a subsequent wave
 Splashing into the shallow jade
 I'm soaking in more ways than one
 Before I even reach the sea foam*

Amidst the crashing waves
 Salt cleansing and stinging their cuts
 Water dousing them at every angle
 Abel and Tara latch onto each other
 Kissing and feeling and absorbing
 Until the ocean is drowning in them

3.0

*Cleansed not of our sins
But our dreariness, had there been any
And now rejuvenated
We return to the Barracuda
A ferocity of the ocean
As we had been not so different
Now awaiting direction on dry land
Tara knows we only head forward
No better direction than that
And, according to the water tower
A mile ahead, foreboding our arrival
The town we approach is Shore County
But we have long since left behind the shore
Crossed the bridge without driving*

“Can I drive?” Tara asks mellifluously
“It’d be my pleasure” Abel replies
“To be the passenger of your chariot”
Tara smiles and bats her eyes
They reenter their vehicle, their chariot

Their battering ram against the next village
 Their spearhead into the next beast
 No amount of teeth and claws can repel them
 As their teeth are fangs, and claws talons

*I open the door and shut it behind me
 The Barracuda rocks briefly
 And I gun the engine, smiling at Abel
 Reflecting his expression through me
 A mirror inverted and double-sided
 To transfer the fervor between us
 Once he's inside, I don't wait
 For his door to shut before I hit the gas*

"Damn, woman!" Abel exclaims
 His open door swings inward, slamming shut
 Narrowly missing his leg by inches
 While Tara howls maniacally
 Her hair, black ropes still damp
 Forming a fibrous cape behind her
 Petite body embracing the steering wheel
 Closer than Abel would ever drive
 But just as fast, just as agile, just as eager

*I can feel his eyes on me
 Branding the skin
 Just to sear their way inside
 Capture the embers within
 Amplify the sound
 Open all valves so that he can
 Imbibe their contents
 And in doing so, know that
 He'll feed me his
 And in doing so, know that*

*We'll be his and mine
Together we'll be everything
Anything that ever matters*

Tara beelines across the bridge
Its guardrails low, basic structure
Asphalt grayed and tattered
This is not a metropolis they approach
This is a necropolis in disguise
Masked only by polite faces
And the genial name on their water tower
Waving to each other blind-heartedly
Taming the animals eager to escape
Herding them to the slaughter

*My gaze doesn't narrow
There are no specifics to Tara
Just everything combined to a whole
All the little things significant
From hair, lips, nose, skin
Eyes are portals to the soul they say
And hers are fucking wormholes
Stars constantly dying and birthing
Fireball dimples in her cheeks, back
They never cease to draw me close
Even when she isn't looking
I know her skin is leering at me
Voice thunderous when it chooses
Otherwise smooth like honey
With the sting of a thousand queen bees
As much bark as there is bite
A female counterpart to me
Everything that is good about myself
With no flaws or faults*

*Because imperfection is superiority
And we are higher than the sun could ever be*

‘Welcome to Shore County
Enjoy Your Stay’ reads a sign
The Barracuda blows past
Leaving it in a cloud of dust and smoke
About the same time that Abel leans for a kiss
Across the console, it isn’t as smooth an action
As it always is with Tara
But he manages nonetheless
Lips to her neck and hands to her body
Places that make her smile explosions
And cry out like a siren
So her foot grows heavier
As if it were even possible
Petals for medals, they love not once
But forever

*I hear Tara’s exultation peak
And then pass the threshold
A change in pitch, she asks in no words
I look up to see a slew of things
That catch my eye almost as much
As Tara does, all the time
From a mint El Camino
To an old-fashioned armored truck
From a small corner bank
To some geezers with nine-millimeters
Doing their job, sure as rain
Soon to fail, feel no pain*

“Yes?” Tara squeals “Say yes!”
“A million times” Abel grins “hell yes, love”

And that is all the discussion they need
 Abel returns to his seat, back firm
 Feet planted in the corners of the floor
 Tara all of a sudden no less prepared
 Both of them howl like ol' west bandits
 Shattering the tranquility of Shore County Square
 Along with a sedan parked in front of the bank
 Sending it tumbling into the tall windows
 Leaving the airbag-less Barracuda on its wheels
 A tank of American muscle
 Now with less than more of a bumper
 Crumpled Hemi hood
 V8 still gurgling power
 And two inhabitants intoxicated with verve

*Well, that went well—
 With the bank's entrance crashed
 Hopefully any security inside
 Will be a tad stunned
 Giving Abel and I time
 To do the deeds of the greedy
 And to feed the needs of our pleading*

Tara and Abel kiss like shooting stars
 Then their doors pop open, brief cover
 But this place is different
 The geezers running the show
 With the armored truck are shaken up
 They've drawn their pistols
 But the speed of reality has them hostage
 And the screams of the stunned
 Give Tara and Abel the advantage
 Although the same ratio of people
 —She and him against the geezers—

And the same amount of firepower
 —A nine-mil for Tara, .38 for Abel—
 The armored truck personnel are down a notch
 In age, in vigor, and somehow or another
 In experience
 This will be an easy victory for the reckless
 This will be a maniacal victory for the young

*The .38 revolver in my hand
 Feels and sounds like a pop-gun
 But it suffices for the time
 Meanwhile my Valkyrie woman
 Carries a Colt 1911 like a soldier
 A warrior drunk with the zeal of power
 Passion and love and sheer frenzy
 We won't die here, under the sun
 We can't die unless we're having fun
 And as I hear Tara wail out of mirth
 Backed by reports from the .45
 I rethink my last conclusion
 Realizing that we just might die here
 So I smile and put on my game face
 Then realize something else, too
 I forgot my shirt back at the beach*

Tara uses the driver's door for cover
 And the window frame for support
 When she's shooting the chunk of metal
 That is the .45-caliber Colt 1911
 Taken from a poor soul back in Murdoch
 Much like the old men here and their Glocks
 Plastic composite pea-shooters
 With good accuracy and a lot o' bullets
 Except that Tara isn't dying today

She reassures herself of this
 Unless, of course, Abel were to fall
 But that isn't going to happen
 No, not today, she tells herself
 So she puts two in one of the geezers
 The driver or passenger
 Who knows, who cares
 He drops with blood in his mouth
 Viscera pumping through holes
 She's sure he didn't feel much of it
 And if he did, he won't anymore

*The sky's wine-bled and screaming
 But then again so is Tara with cerise lips
 A bullet pocks the passenger door
 Which I'm using for cover
 And the geezer left standing—
 Thanks, babe—
 Is somehow getting rounds off
 Which would explain the sudden pain
 Licking at my shoulder
 Much less why my revolver
 Is still as heavy as earlier*

*I look over at Abel
 And I can't help but chortle
 Seeing as how he's taking cover
 But not squeezing the trigger
 Instead, he's play-shooting it
 Much like kids do with their hands
 Or he and I, when we're loose
 But here he is, sober as can be
 —More or less—
 And not a single shot*

*Plus he's shirtless
How could I have missed it
Goddamn, he's cut
Goddamn, he's—*

“Abel!” Tara shouts. She dives
Into the Barracuda, keeping low
As bullets pepper the windshield
And squirms her way to the passenger’s side
Staring nose-to-nose with Abel
Her eyes finding it difficult
To maneuver away from his
Until a bullet sears the air between them
And reality splinters their shared gaze
“You’re hit!” she cries, snagging him
He appears unfazed, and unhurt
Abel shrugs, blindly shoots ahead of them
This time actually squeezing the trigger
This time actually handling real recoil
“And so are you!” he replies, grinning
She looks puzzled
Brief silence comes over them
As the geezer twenty feet ahead
Reloads with his only extra magazine—
Shit like this isn’t supposed to happen
No, not for a millennia in Shore County—
Then Abel slaps Tara in the face
It is a playful slap
Palm to cheek, snaps her out of the daze
Which had breathed a pang of panic into her
Then pinches her cheeks together
Forces her lips to purse out
Abel leans forward and kisses Tara
Their eyes burying into each other

Before the gunfire resumes
 And shouting comes from the bank
 And a smile illuminates Tara's face
 Infecting the two as a whole
 Like a virus of uninhibited animation

*If it weren't for the firefight
 I'd be on top of Abel right now
 And we wouldn't be relocating
 'Til we were both screaming
 The only way we should ever be
 But that isn't the case
 We came here for the ride
 Which includes all the bumps
 And the bruises and blood
 The layers of sweat and lead stink
 Spent brass lingering in the air
 So we pull together
 Shoulder to shoulder
 I feel his blood smear my skin
 And the both of us level anyone
 Who's carrying a gun that isn't us
 Reflection or otherwise*

*Flying bullets, could be explosions
 If she looks at me one more time
 The way she had moments earlier
 The world could be opening up below
 To swallow us whole
 And I'd be on top of Tara
 'Til we were screaming
 With every breath in our lungs
 And I can't imagine when we'd stop
 Except that I know there's more*

*Beyond this measly little town
 So she and I take out the opposition
 In hopes of pushing through, together
 Maybe with some green between us
 If not some blood and adrenaline
 Give me a heart attack two times over
 Remind me I'm alive
 And alive with her, I'd have it
 No other way*

Two security guards manifesting
 At the wreckage of the bank entrance
 Get slatted by small arms fire
 A slew of .45 and .38 bullets
 Put them down in a mist of red air
 Before Abel and Tara's attention swivels
 Back to the remaining geezer
 And the armored truck he now uses as cover
 "He's probably not the driver
 Or else he'd be behind the wheel by now"
 Tara nods, agreeing with Abel
 Ardent to add: "Let's go get him, then"
 "I will, gladly" Abel smiles and they kiss
 When their lips part, Tara's eyes gleam
 "I'm gonna go for the Camino
 When I get back, toss the politicians in the back"
 Abel grins and they kiss yet again
 This time his hand pulls her closer
 They swallow tongues
 Exchange lungs
 And upon withdrawal
 Spring into action—
 Abel is short on cartridges
 But knows Tara has another spare clip

Under the driver's seat of the 'Cuda
Where she had the Colt all along
Which means he needs the geezer's Glock
And as much Parabellum as possible

*I savor Abel's taste
Knowing that it'll last me years
And for now keeps the fuel pumping
Through veins and muscles
So I make way for that El Camino
It's a beautiful emerald
Quite a gem under the sun
A diamond in the rough
Hard to cut, great to steal
And I intend on doing just that
Scooping up an extra magazine
For the Colt in my left hand
Knowing it's my last
I'll make every shot count
The way Abel taught me
The way I taught the gun*

Tara had darted the Barracuda
Right past the Camino
So she makes a beeline behind it
Hugging the left side of the road
Glad to see the cowards keeping distance
Bystanders shrieking in panic
And yet for the most part
Remaining completely vulnerable
To stray bullets and sight of blood

*God forbid they get any on themselves
I glimpse a middle-aged woman*

*Quailing with apprehension
 Under a local shop's awning
 Our eyes connect and I bear my teeth
 Nose wrinkling
 Like a wolf provoked
 Hiss and bark and squeal
 Laughing myself over to the El Camino
 Before pistol-whipping the window
 On the driver's side
 Reaching in and unlocking it
 Not realizing until I'm inside
 Hotwiring under the steering column
 That I've cut myself on some glass
 And I'm bleeding on the ivory leather
 The nice, smooth, hot leather
 Stained and adulterated
 And fucking beautiful*

Abel charges the armored truck
 Revolver barking as his throat strains
 A warcry of sorts spilling forth
 Gunsmoke permeating his nostrils
 Filling his skull with crazed thoughts
 Of death, of afterlife, of now
 He clips the geezer's arm over the hood
 Hears that clap of the Glock hitting asphalt
 Drops the now-empty revolver
 Navigates the truck's front end
 And stops to stare down at the man
 Filled with fright and the shadow of death
 Abel takes the man by his arms
 Lifts his feet off the ground
 Swivels around and puts him down
 About five feet from the truck

Then scoops up the Glock
 And tells the man “go home, sir”
 The armored truck passenger, in his sixties
 Argues the least when he turns his back
 And begins trotting off down the street

*I'm smiling from ear to ear
 When I raise the Glock, squint an eye
 And align the sight with the geezer's back
 As he trots into an awkward run
 Down the street, past onlookers
 Too stupid and too craven to do a thing*

“Pew-pew” Abel voices “pew-pew”
 As he play-shoots the loaded Glock
 And continues doing so
 Until his ears catch the sound of a motor
 Coming up somewhere behind him
 “The road, the road!” Tara’s voice
 Stabs the sudden stillness of the rural air
 Accompanied by honking
 And the lurching of American muscle
 “How could we ever be so damn lucky?”
 Abel’s voice is deep and raspy
 He keeps the line audible to himself
 Before circumventing the back of the truck
 Climbing inside, glad for no surprises
 Like a lurking third security ride-along
 Or barricaded money
 Instead, he can only grin aloud

*As I roll up on the armored truck—
 Its rear directed at the bank
 So I can't get in behind it—*

*I spot Abel jump out the back
 Muscles flexing through skin
 Wielding the awards for fun
 Not compensation for troubles
 And I pump my fist into the air
 Through the driver's side open window
 Having cleared away the glass
 And licked away the blood
 I dance in my seat
 While Abel runs over to the car
 Toting with him the politicians*

Abel hurls the money into the car's bed
 Then kisses Tara before sliding over the hood
 Almost tripping on the other side
 Then ducking into the cabin
 Door shut behind him
 Four lips melting to one mouth
 A foot on the gas
 Hands where they belong
 Ignoring the blood, not as pain
 But a sign of mortality

4.0

“So, what’re we gonna do
With all that money in the back?”
Tara asks, her voice syrup
Glancing over at Abel as they head
Deeper into the day, beneath clouds
Still a clear sky, time on a PCP high
“I’ll tell ya what we’re gonna do, babe”
Abel cocks an eyebrow “Buy us
A nice, luxurious, clean hotel room and—”

*And I can’t say any more
I start busting out in laughter
Tara’s joining me
The elation, the mirth is strong
We’re both tired
But hungry, bloodthirsty for more
And yet what we yearn most
Is to enjoy each other
Under a night sky
On a bed of dead presidents*

In the back of a stolen El Camino
Dried blood on skin
Old sweat replaced with fresh
The same people, the same sounds
The same energy, the same grounds
A new setting
A new experience
No matter the constants
Never the same dance

“Oh my god, Abel” Tara says, laughing
 “You’re gonna make me run us off the road”
 “I know, I’m a funny guy” Abel grins
 He reaches over and seizes her thigh
 Kisses her neck, then her lips
 Because she can’t help but face him
 Whenever he leans in toward her
 Tires groan as they cross white paint
 Skid on the edge of the shoulder
 Then, in a wave of giggles, Tara
 Yanks the wheel and returns to her lane
 Obeying for once the double yellow line
 As the El Camino recovers, and so does she
 Tara looks over at the beaming Abel
 And says with a crooked simper
 “Yeah, funny *looking*”

Abel’s eyes light up like firecrackers
And his smile diminishes
But I know the gaiety remains
It slinks under a log somewhere inside
And awaits regeneration
Awaits the rebuilding courage to lash out
Seize the source and ingest it

*For all that it's worth
And I can tell by his eyes that it's worth
Every fiber that makes him whole*

All of a sudden Abel's hand
Protracts and grabs the e-brake, pulling it
The El Camino stops abruptly, tires burning
Screeching like banshees on the hunt
Tara screams, smiling agape
The planet spins around them
A blur of life and death and ecstasy
Everything that composes their existence
And is the sole reason for their subsistence
The gift of one, the risk of a second
The thrill of another
And it is that same gift they are thankful for
As it is that same risk they abuse
And that same thrill they constantly seek
Abel, overtly now

*When the El Camino stops
I've already pulled her upon me
She straddles and bows
So as to not hit her head
On the low ceiling
And I recline the seat back
So she can sit erect, comfortable
As I work off her shorts
And her fingernails dig into my chest
Time can be patient, now
I wouldn't mind
While daylight penetrates the cabin
Night can wait
It's not like we save passion*

*For one time a day
 And it's not like
 We control ourselves constantly
 Because that wouldn't be
 As much fun as this*

The El Camino sits, engine running
 In the middle of the road, horizontal
 Its length occupying both lanes
 Straddling the double yellow lines
 As firmly as Tara straddles Abel
 And as firmly as his fingers
 Grasp the flesh of her hips
 While her nails draw blood on his chest
 She doubles over him
 The engine is running, indeed
 American muscle under the hood
 As well as in the cabin
 Heatedly rocking the chassis

*The energy in fire and passion
 Coursing through our bodies
 From one to another
 A conductor of sorts
 My sounds fill the car
 Windows down, welcome elsewhere
 I leer into Abel's eyes
 Transfer my hands to his head
 Latch around behind his neck
 Pull him close to me
 So close I'm surprised
 We haven't molded into one
 And we kiss more times
 Than I can count on a hundred hands*

*Then his fingers snake through my hair
Take my face by the cheeks
Pull me down to his face
We kiss again, this time fierce
He bites my lip
And when I withdraw
Copper graces my mouth
I see blood on his lips
And it isn't his*

*The blood on my lips
Is hers, and so it is mine
We rock the car until we believe
The axles just might buckle
And then we rock it more
The radio is off
But the music is jarring
And beautiful
The music we're producing
Is more than any station can handle
And most of it's not even audible*

As Abel and Tara finish
They recline in each other's embrace
Redolent of sweat and sex and blood
Limbs forming latticework
Clothes, if any, disheveled
Ready to go at any point
Leave or delve inside
Ready to show at any point
The cores they refuse to hide

0.5

*I come out of a deep slumber
Hours have passed, at best
Exhaustion peels away
As my eyelids do from eyes
Vision blurred at first
I see that Tara has slumped
Back into the driver's seat
Well, more or less
Just her torso, head on the door
One arm threading the helm
The other on her bare stomach
Naked from navel down to toes
The latter of which rest in my lap
She appears comfortable
She appears at ease
Well rested, we're ready for more
Well rested, we can—*

“You stay right where you are, buddy”
The voice comes from a cop

Glaring down at Abel, Glock two-handed
 Aiming at him through the passenger's window
 Where Abel sits, still as stone
 With the a dormant Tara's legs on his thighs
 Unlike the bottomless-only Tara
 Abel is entirely naked
 And now all of a sudden awkward
 "Hands on the ceiling" says the cop
 His goatee two shades lighter than Abel's
 And those eyes hardly lawful
 Then they shift, and Abel's gaze follows
 To the other side of the El Camino—
 Which remains a single vehicular barricade
 Across the breadth of the road—
 And he hears his own teeth grind
 When he spots a second cop
 Halt at the open driver's side window
 Glock at port-arms as his eyes drop
 To the peaceful, beautiful
 Half-naked and helpless Tara

*I'm two seconds away from
 Getting shot by two feral swine
 Trying to protect Tara
 And this is before anything
 Incriminating actually happens
 But I can see it in their eyes
 Smell the rankness in their breath
 The debauchery drooping from skin
 And then I realize
 Two seconds has long since passed
 And I'm still sitting here*

"Wakey, wakey, ice queen"

The cop at the driver's side says
 And his weaselly voice snares Tara
 She startles awake, eyes adhering to Abel
 Before staring down the barrel of a Glock
 Not three inches from her man's face
 "Sit up, babe, we'll be fine" Abel murmurs
 His palms on the ceiling
 Fingers trying not to tremble
 Failing miserably

*How can such lucid, pleasant
 Dreams turn to such
 Contorted, unbelievable nightmares
 And I know I'm not still asleep
 And I can see Abel's skin quiver
 Not in trepidation
 But in restraint
 For what he so longs to do
 I know he wants to
 And I'm not so far from him
 But he also has more than
 Half a brain
 And too much heart
 To risk either for either of us
 Then I see his eyes deviate
 From me to behind me
 I turn and look up
 Through the window
 Into another Glock, this one closer
 And this man, meaner looking*

"Shit" Tara mumbles
 She sits up and raises her hands
 Head pivoting to look at the man nearest

To her left, too close for comfort
 Standing just outside the El Camino
 But her eyes regard of more importance
 The black-and-white cruiser fifteen feet away

*I know what Tara's thinking
 —There's a camera on the dash
 Of that cop car
 However, I highly doubt it
 'Cause if these cops were smart
 They'd have it off
 Or maybe they'll destroy it later
 Though, if they were really smart
 They wouldn't have taken this course
 They would have been lawful
 Or, better yet, kept on going
 Until Hell caught up with them*

“Donnie, get the girl out” says the cop
 Hovering over Abel, motioning with his gun
 “You too, fella, nice ‘n’ easy”
 The cop steps back, pistol in both hands
 As Abel nods to Tara and they both
 Slowly, gingerly exit the car
 “Can we get our clothes on, please?”
 Abel asks, without making eye contact—
 Because he knows that if he does
 He might just lose himself—
 “They’re right there on the floor”
 The cop behind him steps forward
 And buries the muzzle of his pistol
 Right between Abel’s bare shoulder blades
 “Oh, no you don’t” he growls “nor the bitch”
 Abel’s nostrils flare

Conflagration seizes his eyes
 Meanwhile, 'Donnie' guides Tara
 To the front of the car, gesturing with the Glock
 But following the other cop's every move
 "Hands on the hood, the both of ya" says the cop
 And Donnie reiterates for Tara
 As if she couldn't hear him
 And, albeit reluctantly and stiffly
 Both of them comply—their gazes joined
 Staring at each other from across the hood
 Tara very concerned with Abel's look
 And Abel all the more concerned
 With Donnie's look

*'Donnie,' now, is it?
 I'll have to remember that—
 But who's his butt-buddy?
 Regardless I keep myself focused
 Eyes don't lift from Donnie
 He's weaselly and young
 Clearly the other's apprentice
 But something tells me
 That he isn't new to any of this
 Which only makes the butterflies
 Swarming around in my gut
 Get so much fucking bigger
 With every sluggish second that passes*

"Feet apart, now, spread 'em" Donnie says
 His smile dirtier than his badge
 And at the same time
 The one behind Abel steps forward
 Abel can hear his boots grind the asphalt
 And there is the faintest of hope

In both Abel and Tara
 That a civilian might pass by
 Or, better yet, a righteous policeman
 If this country has any left
 “Can I go ahead, Gary?” Donnie asks
 “I don’t see why not” ‘Gary’ replies
 And then Abel’s muscles spasm
 Not overtly, but within
 Something else deeper goes taut
 As Gary puts the gun to the back of his head
 And says “Guess I’ll go ahead, then”

*I’m standing here
 About to have my last sight be
 Tara, groped by the pig behind her
 Fear and disgust and rage
 Painting her face
 Soon to be my brain spatter too
 The emotions ablaze inside me
 Have long since been kindled
 And the fuse, short
 Stubbier than they might like
 The spark already lit
 With an effect nothing shy of
 Immensely volatile*

*‘Donnie,’ is it?
 I’ll have to remember that
 For when I’m eulogizing
 Standing over your wretched—
 Oh, god—
 His hands didn’t last long
 At my chest
 Now they’re past my midriff*

*Slithering between my legs
 Yeah, the things I'm going to do—
 I hear his buckle unclasp
 All the while that gun
 Presses into my nape
 And my palms form white fists
 Firm atop the El Camino's hood
 I've looked down at them
 And when I look back up
 The fire is absent from Abel's eyes
 All that remains is
 Unrestrained wrath*

Gary smoothly transitions the Glock
 To his personal sidearm, a hand cannon
 Stainless .357 Smith & Wesson
 It replaces the Glock's plastic muzzle
 Against the back of Abel's head
 To the revolver's hard steel tip
 And Abel's ears turn lupine for a brevity—
 He hears Donnie's pants, namely the buckle
 Hit the pavement at his feet
 Concurrently, the pronounced crank
 Of a heavy revolver's hammer cocking—
 Then he throws himself into Gary
 The hair-trigger revolver goes off
 Thunder splitting the silence
 A hefty magnum round skyward
 Gary's nose snaps against Abel's skull
 His blood smearing Abel's scalp
 They plunge into the black floor
 Abel on top of Gary, wrestling
 And Tara's patience has reached thin ice
 She screams irately

Followed by a swift duck
 Catching Donnie in a moment of surprise
 From Abel's actions
 She spins on her heels, skin on asphalt
 Puts two fists into Donnie's package
 Her middle fingers slightly raised above the rest
 And bathes in the agonal sound he makes
 Before dropping his Glock—
 Right into Tara's cradling hands

*Gary got in a decent swing
 But after that a fury of rage
 Replaced the man I was earlier
 And by the time I stand up
 Even his mother couldn't recognize him
 Then I drive my bare heel
 Between his legs
 Listen to him squeal
 Before scooping up that .357
 I level it at his bruised forehead
 And tell him*

“Now we're even” Abel squeezes
 The revolver roars
 Gary's head opens up
 Gore splashing the asphalt
 And Abel can hear brain sizzle
 Despite the season, the sun is up
 But not for long
 And it's hardly shining for Donnie
 Who at the moment is standing
 Albeit slumped
 Some ten feet away from the squad car
 What might as well be his hearse

With Tara standing three feet away
 She has two inches over the weasel
 Still bottomless
 And though she's uninjured
 Though her tanktop remains
 She has lost her head

*I lower the Glock to take better aim
 Squeeze the trigger and watch
 His kneecaps, from left to right
 Go healthy to horrible
 In the matter of a heartbeat
 His, I can imagine is off the charts
 And mine, never even graced the charts
 He's wailing like a newborn
 Rolling around on the asphalt
 I go to stand over him
 And I want to say something
 My tongue writhes to speak
 But all I can do is
 Shoot*

Abel's head turns
 At the sound of gunfire
 He sees Tara standing, Donnie not
 And when he circumvents the Camino
 He hears nothing but a slew of hollow clicks
 Tara towering over a
 Deader-than-dead dirty cop
 With over fifteen nine-millimeter slugs
 Turning his torso into Swiss cheese
 And a beyond-painful expression
 Afflicting his young face
 Abel whispers for Tara

Afraid to startle her
Then wraps his arms around her
And they reel back, slowly
Until Abel's back touches the El Camino
He holds Tara before kissing her
Then realizes she got some of Donnie's blood
On her skin, not much
A few sizable gobbets on her legs
But her waist and inner thighs
Feel tarnished, violated
Pale skin blemished by pink handprints
Fresh sweat, and not the tolerable kind

*I have Tara
More than I have had her before
We stare into wild eyes
Fires subdued
But not extinguished
Replaced by fresher flames
The kind we cherish
And then, together, we look back
At the cop car sitting there
Then to each other again
I thread her hair with my fingers
And tell her I love her
More than the asphalt will remember*

0.6

Abel and Tara withdraw from the cop car
Each with an unopened bottle of water in hand
Then Abel takes Donnie's pants
Partially rolls them up
Stuffs the top half into the gas tank
Tara hands him a Zippo lighter
She found in the glovebox of the cop car
Then backs up, hands over her head
Beaming and eyes locked on Abel
As he, still entirely naked, creates flame
Snickering, lights the pantlegs
And scuffles away like a hoodlum
Having too much fun with his girl
Chalking another up in the arson column
Not to mention counter police brutality
Lethal self-defense
And having too hell of a good time with it
That is, feeling forced to do so
After what they've been put through
So the fire is on the move

Crawling up the dark blue fabric
 And when it reaches the tank
 Abel and Tara are flat against the Camino
 Hands on each other's faces
 Caressing and kissing gently
 Eyes somehow everywhere at once

*We watch the dirty cops' car
 Go up in a fireball of justice
 Glorious, violent, overkill justice
 Righteous to every bullet spent
 Every drop of blood spilt
 Including what I've gotten on me
 Scars that will wash off
 So Abel helps me—
 Using the waters taken from the car
 He showers me in the middle of the road
 We're grateful for no passersby
 Although we could've done
 Well without those cops
 Here we are nonetheless
 Faring, managing
 Giggling and wasting precious water
 Despite mouths that never go arid
 And more than enough
 Wetness in our eyes
 To last us years in the desert*

*Twirling like a ballerina
 Tara's under a makeshift shower
 More than half the water bottle
 Goes to cleaning the blood off her
 It dampens her hair
 Making the black even blacker*

And the pale skin
Gleaming sheens of beauty
She's sex personified
Even at the epicenter of chaos
She holds her ground
Takes care of herself
And I'm there to lend a hand
And I'm there to take her hand

Abel uses the residual water
 In the first bottle for himself
 Just his face and torso
 Knuckles, too, dried blood
 Then they share the second bottle
 For their mouths and throats
 Hungry yet, not for food
 But some of the fast lane
 Before they have to surrender the El Camino
 For whatever reason the street claims
 However, it will not seize them
 The two cops, on the other hand
 Abel and Tara leave them where they lie
 Sullied in more ways than one
 Blood all over the place
 But no longer on either Abel nor Tara

Waves of fresh air wash over me
And so does the gaze of Abel
I want us to get back into the car
And go wherever it takes us
Abel behind the wheel
My feet in his lap
Legs outstretched
Back to the passenger's side door

*So that I can see him always
And he can see my face smile
Even when I'm howling at top speed*

Redressed—Abel in his jeans
Still shirtless, the beach's hostage
And Tara, back in her denim shorts
Tanktop snug, body right at home—
They return to the El Camino
Abel at the helm, as per Tara
Doors shut, Tara his beloved passenger
Windows nonexistent
The El Camino lurches forward
Tara stretches out, beautiful
Legs extended, ankles crossed
In Abel's lap, safe from the wheel
Leaning against the inside of the door
Tara lolls her head on the window sill
When she isn't staring at Abel
Gloating in the emanations
Unseen but far from unfelt

*I can't help but get lost in them
Tara's features, her eyes and smile
Her face and the small things
Her body and the everything
But I heed the road, too, and all else
So I drive the both of us onward
With not much of a goal besides
Punishing the horizon for betraying us
And make new peace with the skies of time*

.07

*The fast lane keeps us going
Hours must have passed
Before the light begins to recede
Clouds form in strips
Layering the sun away from us
Calling forth the moon
Sometime soon ahead
Should it desire to shed its own light
On a place it barely has control over
Meanwhile the Camino pushes eighty
But I feel like I'm going
So much faster
With Abel across the way
Every so often massaging my feet
Reminding me of what we saved
Back there against those cops
Reminding me what we risk*

Though both deep and shallow
Swim in the recesses of their minds

There is no music this time around
Just the hum of the El Camino
That sound of wind eviscerated by speed
Slapping the metal and filling the cabin
Playing with Tara's hair
And producing gooseflesh of their skin
There is also the erratic speech
Laughs thunderous and discordant
Just the same, hushed chuckling
Unintelligible gibberish
When the energy between them distends
Not minding if they wreck in the midst
Not minding if they barrel-roll into space

*Night is a cunning deviant
But when it finally comes around
A vague sense of fatigue
Creeps into my veins
I can tell Tara is no different
But the day, despite
The recession of sunlight
Is still very much alive
And we aren't ones to waste
A single minute of it
So long as the day prevails
We shall, too*

They drive some more
After a point with the desire to pull over
Because there is a lingering hope
For a certain spot they might pass
Perfect for a night's stay
Perfect for making love under the stars
While still remaining aloof

From the rest of the world
Just Tara and Abel
With the car and money as a backdrop
No regrets, no amends
Just their abstract canvas
Whose colors make no more sense
Than their lives have up through now

*It isn't long before
My gaze catches glimpse
Of that perfect spot
One I know Tara will love
And would have spotted before I
Had she been facing that way
Instead, her dreary eyes paint me
Back still against her door
Legs still outstretched
Feet in my lap
One of my hands on the wheel
And another on her ankle
Then my foot stomps the break
Rubber squeals
The separate loads of cash
In the bed of the Camino
Slide forward
Just as I do in my seat
And Tara almost does*

“Sorry, babe” Abel says
Trying not to laugh at Tara’s suddenly
Very awkward position
“But I found it—why don’t you take a look?”
So Tara rolls her eyes
Climbs back into her seat, legs retracted

Swings her head to the right
 And lets the view reel her in
 When she looks back at Abel
 Her eyes are no different than the stars
 Studding the deep blue-black sky above them
 And her smile, lips quivering
 An exhibition of jubilation and satisfaction
 Just as well, not without avidity
 "I'll park 'er about twenty feet from the edge"
 Abel says, and swings the El Camino
 Around so he can reverse onto the grass

*It's an impeccable spot
 Off the side of the road
 No ditch of a shoulder
 Just smooth transition onto grass
 Which has a broad expanse
 Before dropping down a cliff
 That plummets into the sea below
 At least a three-hundred foot fall
 From when we crossed a bridge
 Not two minutes ago
 Yes, this spot will be perfect
 For the night, for Abel and I*

Abel parks the El Camino off the road
 Onto the grassy precipice
 Tailgate some twenty feet from the edge
 Beneath an ocean of stars
 A silver sliver of a moon
 Emanating its gentle glow below
 Casting a fine sheen on the green
 Of the car, and moreover on the pale skin
 Of Tara as she eagerly exits

Shutting the door behind her
Leaving Abel to smile and shake his head
Before disembarking to join his woman
“Perfect, ain’t it?” Abel asks
Tara is less than six feet from the cliff
When she turns and pounces Abel
Latching her legs around his waist
Hands clasping behind his neck
Lips distant briefly before unified
By which time a newfound energy
Has claimed them its own
Perhaps the night is responsible
Perhaps the moon controls more
Than just the ocean’s tide
It just might sway their ocean too

*I ask Abel to dance with me
And he begins twirling
Insanity personified
But not without the extreme ardor
To be willing to part with a world
That might be seen as sane
Clean and unified
Affable and compassionate
We are most of these things
But not all
And above the rest
It became evident not long ago
That the world, in all its sanity
And demands for perfection
We wouldn’t be a part of it
It wasn’t that we didn’t fit into it
But that it didn’t fit into us
And somewhere down the road*

*We ingested each other
While imbibing the freedom
And have since let it
Take its course with ourselves
From head to toe
And everywhere in between
The fibers unseen
But everything truly felt
And so I fell deeper in love
With this man, this symbol
Of everything feral
And uninhibited life has to offer
So, I dance with him
We sing and hum tunes
To no songs in particular
Giggling and twirling and
Making fools of the air amid us*

Some time later
Abel eludes Tara's reaching hands
Fingers raking empty space
Playing a game of tag
Atop the grassy precipice
Where one misstep could mean
Certain death
Something they've long since
Shed the fear of
And then Abel hurdles over the tailgate
Landing in the bed of the El Camino
Rocking the chassis on its wheels
Moving with the sway
As if he is surfing waves
Tara laughs from a few feet away
Gawking up at him

As if he is the seventh wonder
And the wave he is conquering
Is about to encompass Tara too

*I feel this strong breeze
Sweep by us, around us
It is so sudden and impactful
That it nearly topples me
But I am more concerned
With Tara being the source
Of my untimely demise
Get too sidetracked or distracted
So easy with her right here
So easy with her in my everywhere*

“Did you feel that *breeze*!?” Tara beams
“You bet I did” Abel replies
“It nearly pushed me off of here”
Tara chortles
“Why don’t you come down, then” she says
That explosive mirth subduing
As if a spell is cast over her
She smiles softly, almost absently
And her eyes roll impassively under
A slightly furrowed brow
Eyebrows black snakes of hair
Sly and alluring
She backpedals slowly
Closing the distance between her
And the grassy lip of the precipice
“Looks like I have no choice” Abel mutters
“If I do, will you stay grounded?”
“I’m never grounded” Tara simpers
Abel bites his bottom lip

Jaws clenched, sweat sheeting skin
 He hops down, tailgate unlatching
 Bare feet hit the surprisingly healthy grass
 And he slinks closer to Tara
 Who has abruptly halted in reverse
 Albeit with heels teetering on the edge
 Of a stage backdropped by the night
 Far below them, fathoms of the deep
 And a fall greater than three-hundred feet
 Tara waits until Abel is nose to nose with her
 She waits until she can smell
 His breath, his sweat
 And then, amidst a search in his eyes
 She surrenders balance

*Whenever I look into her eyes
 It's as if nothing else exists
 Especially when I'm so nigh
 She has neither body nor milieu
 Just dark irises that hold mine
 In their grandest reflection
 No vivid color to them
 And yet somehow so marvelous
 A beauty too simplified by color
 So when she starts to fall back
 It takes me a heartbeat to realize
 That her eyes are all of a sudden
 Not quite as near
 As they had been
 But by that time my arms lasso her
 And she is nowhere but
 In my embrace, against my body
 Lips bridged in more ways than one
 The breeze still vehement*

*As is siphoning from us passion
Transferring to the elements
Though if this were truest
Then the sea beneath us
Would be on its highest stilts
And the very earth
Shifting to form new valleys
Oblivious to the life it destroys
And the spectacles it bears*

*We're kissing for millennia
When I get the idea
A light bulb of embers in my head
And all of a sudden I want to share them
These embers, these lights
With Abel and the air around us
So I guide him to the Camino
Double over the lowered tailgate
Feel him greet me from behind
And then turn around
To greet him myself
Caught red-handed
Sexier in the wake
Than having never went for it
But my fresh idea
Has now ensnared his attention*

Tara unbundles a wad of cash
And fans them into the breeze
It seems to Abel as if her laughter
Is what really carries them into the air
Then, in the midst of a cyclone of wind
The dead presidents swirl about them
Pale green slips of paper

No more than tickets of fun to set free
 For Abel and Tara
 Yet as she lets loose a second bundle
 The two of them watching the bills
 Drift through the air
 Carried by Earth's breath
 Tara throws a hand into Abel's jeans
 Fingers snaking through pockets
 Sending Abel into a series of laughs
 And the attempt to evade her
 Until, at last, Tara finds her prey—
 A single Zippo lighter
 Which she flips open
 Strikes flame on the first try
 And dangles a banknote above it
 All the while grinning in the subtle glow

*Tara, Tara, Tara
 Tsk-tsk-tsk
 I shake my head
 But find myself grinning
 And want her
 More than anything right now
 To burn that bill
 Set it loose to the wind
 And see where it takes us
 Feel the heat dissipate in the air
 Whisper secrets of flame
 Upon our skin
 Remind that the three of us are alive
 In our own way*

Tara dips the bill in the flame
 Which is dancing amid the breeze

And the corner goes up beautifully
But she doesn't let it spread
Instead she closes the lighter
And casts it into the breeze
Which takes it as a prisoner
Cycling it through the winds
It doesn't take long before Abel has a go
Tara sharing the Zippo liberally
Within minutes they have set fire
To nearly an entire bundle
By which time the lighter returns to
One of Abel's deep pockets
And their hands lace together
Swinging each other around in circles
Dancing under the stars
Entwined with unseen trajectories
Of a breeze with its own mind
Setting flight to the blazing money
Making crisp the air
And warming their presence

*It's gorgeous and dangerous
I love every millisecond of it
Abel's hand holds tight mine
We speculate the little green fairies
With their tails ablaze
Cartwheeling around us so freely
We've cast their burial
And given them safe passage*

As they let the night
Take their own minds hostage
One of the bills floats nigh
Kisses Tara on the back of her shoulder

Singing the skin
Beckoning a yelp from parted lips
Abel tends to her
Bringing his to the singed skin
“Some women just want to
Watch the world burn
But sometimes it wants to burn back”
Abel says, flashing an archaic smile
Which Tara wants to kiss
But instead pushes him away
Though the distance closes on itself
As quickly as it had formed

*A lick of flame
Glad I didn't melt
A kiss of Abel
Too bad I didn't explode
Give me all of it
And then some*

Before the lot of bills make their way
Elsewhere, to destinations unknown
Tara trips Abel into falling
But not by himself
Instead they plummet into the grass
Together, arms and legs entangled
Abel lands on his back
Tara atop him, knees hugging his hips
She erects her back
Abel's thighs supporting her buttocks
And pulls the tanktop over her head
Dropping it in the grass
Abel smiles up at her
His hands grasping her bare waist

She shares his look of enticement
As if gazing into a mirror
One of flesh and soul and subconscious

*As I gaze up at Tara
Her breasts small but perfect
Skin like warm ice in the night
I notice the crescent moon
Seems as if it isn't so far
A half-halo for my love
And more stars than we could count
None of them worthy candidates
To fill the cosmos in her eyes*

“What’re you so happy about?”
Tara asks in a small voice
Abel sits up and breathes into her
“I’ll show you”

.08

*As per Tara's request
I am at the helm yet again
Of this jungle green El Camino
Setting fire to the asphalt
At the start of a brand new day
Surely hours past sunrise
The rest of the dead presidents
Have replaced her passenger spot
With me up front
Collectively on the floormat
While Tara, in all of her lunacy
Has taken to the bed
This swap with the money
First had me worried
And then I blinked
And felt her idea coursing through me
Vein by vein, artery by artery
Her blood in mine
Without ever spilling any*

The El Camino roars through country
An oblivion of rolling hills
And cattle-specked farmlands
Hugging a single rural highway
Filletted by double yellow lines
And perpetually violated
By these two torn souls
Pieced together only by each other
Tara starts off sitting down
Fully dressed—denim shorts and tanktop
Letting the speed of the vehicle
Governed only by Abel's pedal foot
Air-condition her body
Raise her spirits into the clouds
While keeping her safe in the car
And then she rises to knees
Swaying back and forth, hooting
The thrill voicing itself
Fun conducting through her throat
Reverberations of exhilaration
Shrill in the otherwise still country scene

*Windows down, as always
I don't let Tara have all the fun
I tap the brakes at will
Listen to her shriek and laugh
I fishtail under control
Listen to her exclaim in mirth
Let loose my own howls
Excitement bubbling in my blood
No doubt broiling Tara's
My heart skips a beat
Only so that hers can
Take a vacation*

*The sight before me is open road
 Vanishing point
 Down a drag strip's worth of asphalt
 Riding a yellow border
 Until a passerby in a pickup
 Nears and I veer into my lane
 Gaze locking onto the rearview
 I see Tara grapple fingers
 To the edge of the bed
 And wail like a siren
 Batteries very much included
 Warning: high voltage*

The pickup truck driver
 Protrudes an arm out the window
 As he speeds on by
 Middle finger skyward
 Tara only howls louder
 And then Abel returns to the middle
 Occupying a bit of both lanes
 Simultaneously
 Because one isn't enough
 He climbs back up to sixty
 By which time
 Tara shouts something incoherent
 And Abel, eyes on the rearview
 Goes from seeing Tara's back
 To her denim-clad buttocks
 And he knows she is standing now
 Holding onto nothing more
 Than the corners of the cab's roof
 While wind swallows her
 Spits her out, she stands yet
 Firm and officious

This vehicle is a vessel
Carrying her and Abel as they please
And she will not cease the adventure
Even if the world doesn't respond
She will only raise the stakes
Even if the world responds with spite
She will stand taller
Abel, meanwhile, drives smooth
As he is now forced to
But, without engaging eye contact
He feels Tara's voice
Telling him to go faster
Faster, he feels her tongue, faster

*Fuck the burning bills
Floating in a cyclone of wind
This is my best idea yet
And the arrow I'm riding
Is eviscerating the peaceful country
In the only way Abel and I know how
Fast, disorderly, perilous
I want him to only go faster
And not long after the thought
Graces my conscience
Do I feel my skin pulsate
The El Camino proves its name
Becoming one with the road
And taking us along for the ride*

Abel's focus is forward
With an occasional glimpse to the rearview
While Tara's is the past
And everything zipping by her sides
It is as if they control the passage of time

As well as its hold on this plane
 They are at the reins of perception
 And the only thing they care to do
 Is abuse their power
 Hasten the progress into vacuity
 Enjoying the blurs of scenery
 Embraced by this new day

*I almost don't notice
 A black-and-white pull out
 From behind a massive billboard
 On the left side of the road
 But I know Tara catches it alright
 Because she calls me abruptly
 But it isn't fright in her voice
 Nor so much panic
 As a burst of sudden amusement
 I see her return to her knees
 Hands on the edge of the bed
 Head pivoted to the side
 And, through a storm of black hair
 I can see her smiling big*

“Are these guys crazy!?” Tara yells
 “No more than we are, babe” Abel laughs
 The cop car falls in behind the Camino
 Both of them between sixty and seventy
 Abel having slowed ever so slightly
 So that Tara could get to her knees again
 But now their sirens illuminate
 More sound than light
 And its discordance reprimands
 Everything that Abel and Tara live for
 “Shall I pull over for the gentlemen!?”

Abel yells out the window
Their voices high to be heard
Over the roaring of the El Camino
Blended with the surging wind
“Pull – over – now!” a cop demands
His speaker working perfectly
But his voice just a little off
“Hey, Abel!”
“Yeah, Tara?”
“Let’s ask Mister .357!”
“Sure thing” Abel mutters and
One-hands the steering wheel
As he reaches for Gary’s S&W
Resting in the passenger’s seat
He checks the cylinder
In all but a few seconds
Then snaps it shut and calls out to her
“Fore!”

*I catch the hefty revolver
Albeit awkwardly
Finger the trigger guard
And hear Abel yell
That I’ve got five slugs left
So, standing back up
I tell Abel to keep ‘er steady
And not for an instant
Does my confidence in him lapse*

*You got this, babe—
I keep the Camino
At a steady fifty
While surveying the turmoil
Between the rearview*

*And side-view mirrors
But would much rather it be
Me in the back
If not replacing Tara
Then by her side
With two of the stolen Glocks
In both hands
Peppering that fucking car
For all that we're worth
But I know we don't have
That kind of ammunition*

Tara manages to maintain balance
While wielding the revolver in both hands
Elbows locked, sights aligned
With the squad car pursuing them
Its siren no more than a nuisance
And so is the first to go—
At this range, as good a shot
As Tara has always been
She knows missing won't be a problem
It's all about her choice of targets
So the first shot shatters
The lightbar atop the car's roof
And that broken-record sound dies off
Like a robot euthanized
Then Tara lowers her aim
But the cops' patience has sapped
The passenger's window lowers
An arm extends
And in the hand is not a bullhorn
But some kind of semi-automatic
Which is all Tara needs to know
Before she lets rip the .357

Each shot is a thunderclap
The first punches a jagged hole
In the cop car's windshield
Between the cab's inhabitants
But is enough to jar the driver's focus
So it fishtails wildly for a moment
And Tara adds to their chaos—
The next shot blows a front tire
The pop is loud
But drowned out by the gunshot
Echoing in the open country
Tara hoots and handles the recoil
Like someone who's done this
More than once or twice
Or five times before

*My ears are ringing
Like bells with too much lung capacity
And my wrists hurt
But my ankles are firm, balance sustained
I can only imagine the concern
Worming its way through Abel
Right about now
Much less the adrenaline
And then there's me—
I know I only have two shots left
Better make them count*

Despite the blown tire
The driver is headstrong to continue
And the Crown Vic pushes onward
Fishtailing back into alignment
But the blown tire is
Deterring it from perfect balance

Tara prepares to take her next shot
 When the passenger cop
 Returns fire, this time with meaning
 The first shot goes awry
 Searing the air not far from Tara's face
 The next a little lower but further away
 His aim is right
 However, the squad car wobbles
 And so does his arm bounce
 But that pistol's recoil
 Is one-eighths of the .357
 So the shots come faster
 And then his third—
 The nine-millimeter round
 Grazes Tara's left leg
 Punctures the Camino's rear window
 Grazes Abel's right bicep
 Lodges itself in the radio

*Pain, leg, blood, warmth
 I scream
 Finger squeezes trigger
 Gun bucks
 Bullet soars off, astray
 I drop to my right knee
 Scream again
 Throat raspy
 Fireballs in my eyes
 I hope they can see
 Because they're going to feel—*

*I hear Tara scream
 The sound guts the air
 And my own stomach wrenches*

*As my arm weeps blood
Pain in the back of my mind
Tara screams again
Not one of her howls of fun
This is different, agonal
Incense immediate transition*

Tara hears the cop shoot some more
Abel deserves a medal
For keeping the Camino so steady
He hasn't voiced his injury
For all Tara knows
It's in the flesh of her thigh
The pain is there
But for a moment it numbs
And she takes her final shot
Sees crimson splash the windshield
From the driver's side
Instantly the squad car swerves right
She can barely hear the passenger
Yell out in panic
Then it plunges into a ditch
The front end pancakes
And Tara collapses to her rear
Legs outstretched
The wound not so bad, she sees
Pain in a sting and blood streaming

*The El Camino accelerates
I pivot my head
To see a hole in the rear window
Speckled with my blood—
And Abel's bare bicep, grazed
Much worse than my leg*

*There is blood on the dash
Blood descending his arm
A wrecked radio
And a weak, crooked grin
Staining Abel's face*

“Welcome back, goddess”
He says, his voice raspy
“How you doin’ back there?”
“Better than you” she smiles
“Car’s running on empty—”
Abel sighs
“I’m gonna stop at the next station
Fill ‘er up, get some grub
Tend our scars
Kiss yours
And we’ll be on our merry fuckin’ way”

9

*Abel seems to be holding up
Pretty damn well
The bullet that grazed my leg
Took a mean chunk from his bicep
I don't think a shirt
Would have stopped the bullet
Despite Abel's murmuring
About him still being topless
I ask him, staying in the bed
If me being topless too
Might help comfort him
To which he responded*

“If it makes *you* feel better
“Go right for it, babe”
Tara could only smile
And now the Camino is pushing eighty
In hopes of reaching a gas station
Somewhere out here
In the middle of nowhere

It more than seems
 That orange needle wobbling
 And the one for the gas tank
 Passing the 'E' on its way down
 "How's the leg?" Abel asks
 "Just peachy" Tara replies
 Her gaze, swept over the cab's roof
 Glimpses a structure ahead
 On their right, less than a quarter mile
 "You see that!?" Tara shouts
 The country breeze has faded
 But the draft around the car
 Is still as strong as its speed
 "Nah, see what?" Abel replies
 Sitting low, staring through
 A grimy windshield
 His view is limited
 And when he glances in the rearview
 His view is perfect
 "Yeah, it's a gas station" Tara adds
 It comes into view, over some tallgrass
 As Abel pushes the car onward
 "I see it! Tara, sit down, hold on!"

*Since the cop car
 Tara shot into a ditch
 We haven't been driving for long
 Perhaps ten minutes
 If even that
 Before this gas station come into view
 And it's a relieving sight
 As we draw nearer
 I have Tara get stable back there
 So I tap the brakes*

*Fishtail to a crawl
 Pull in under the station's roof
 The columns and pumps
 Look rusted, grubby
 The building part
 Is fortunately the kind with
 A small convenience store
 And for us, very convenient
 Though the place looks
 Borderline abandoned
 Tallgrass from the plains surrounding it
 Underbrush arid
 Hugging the walls at its sides
 Tattered concrete by the pumps
 Grimy windows
 And a magnificent "we're open" sign*

"This place looks dead"
 Tara mutters
 By now Abel has parked by a pump
 And isn't tentative on disembarking
 He swings around to the bed
 Leaning over the edge
 Cups Tara's face, thumbs on her cheeks
 She is not crying
 The only sign of weakness is the blood
 Streaming from her leg wound
 Down to her foot
 A small, thin puddle in the bed
 "You good? Hungry?"
 Abel asks, kissing her briefly
 "Always" she replies
 He grins and tells her to stay put
 "I'll be back in less than five" he says

Turns his back, leans into the cabin
 Snags one of the Glocks
 Stuffs it into the tail of his jeans
 And strides for the convenience store
 Gaze locked on the 'open' sign
 Until he reaches it
 Pulls the glass door open
 Makes a beeline under dim fluorescence
 For the refrigerated section
 It begins with water, then milk
 Energy drinks, then soda
 And, lastly, booze in the back
 Every section is poorly stocked
 Abel imagines much of it expired
 But that's the good thing about water
 As for the snacks, he and Tara
 Will just have to take their chances
 After everything they've been through
 And whatever more, Abel imagines
 They won't be ended by food poisoning
 Although it would sure be
 Due for some good laughs

*I'm five feet from the water section
 When a voice catches my attention
 To be honest
 I was a bit startled
 This place feels like a cemetery
 Only with provisions
 And one of my ears is ringing
 Thanks to Mister .357
 But I hear her clearly
 Albeit incoherently
 At first*

*When I turn on my heel
 I see the clerk behind the counter
 Older, say sixties
 Short bushy gray hair
 A tad overweight, stout
 Stupefied face, eyes confused
 Whether or not they should be
 Wide or squinting
 Small, round glasses
 And hands that quiver on the counter
 Her voice, even smaller
 And yet a form of calm*

“Do you need any help, sir?”
 She asks, not stammering the slightest
 Abel looks back at the front door
 Can only see a portion of the El Camino
 Through the door—posters plastering the windows
 Then returns his gaze to the clerk
 Cocks an eyebrow and opens his mouth
 But he’s interrupted by a ‘ding’

*Awkward silence ensues
 I step into the convenience store
 The bell above the door sounds
 So much for a stealthy entrance
 I’m staring at Abel fifteen feet away
 He’s staring back at me
 Reluctance in his expression
 But not toward me
 I see the old lady clerk
 Behind the counter to my left
 She looks about as flabbergasted
 As she looks concerned*

*Faintly apprehensive
 I see her size me up
 Those small eyes regarding most
 The wound on my leg
 And surely the one on Abel's arm
 The blood, no longer flowing
 As much as it has dried to the skin
 Certainly we must reek
 Of perspiration and dirt
 And whatever the blood emits
 Life sweating through the flesh*

Tara steps forward, door shutting
 Behind her, another 'ding'
 There is a slight limp in her walk
 But otherwise Tara stands tall
 Dogged and audacious
 "I thought I told you to stay in the car"
 Abel says, his voice low
 But audible across the store
 "I didn't want to be without you" she replies
 Her voice just as low, only softer
 Though with a tint of hoarseness too
 "C'mere" Abel sighs
 Tara trots over to him
 They hug and kiss briefly
 But Abel keeps an eye on the clerk
 His left arm around her waist
 He grazes something on her lower back
 No, he feels it with his pinky
 Something stuffed into her shorts
 Must be rather uncomfortable
 A Glock is no Smith & Wesson
 Composite plastic, lightweight

Nonetheless a handgun
 “We good?” Abel murmurs
 Tara goes on her tiptoes
 Though she doesn’t need to much
 And whispers into his ear
 “Better” her words are wet
 Through lips that barely part
 A dehydrated mouth
 But more than moist lips
 “I’ve got two bundles in my pockets”
 She adds “And the Glock”
 Abel nods, swallowing
 A faint smile sweeps his face

*I see movement in his eyes
 Yet they remain still
 Looking down into mine
 He absorbs my thoughts
 Without any clairvoyance
 Then looks over at the clerk
 His voice is raspy, demanding
 The woman cringes at first
 But she is all ears
 She has nothing else to wield*

“The green Camino out front, it’s running
 And needs gas” Abel says “Fill ‘er up
 And get outta here—but we’re
 Gonna need your car keys”
 The woman just stands there
 Now less concerned and more afraid
 Unbeknownst to the cash in the Camino
 Much less the havoc they’ve wrought
 Though she can draw up a guess or two

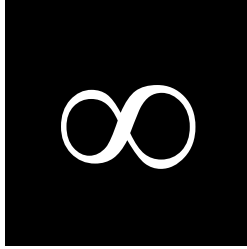
“Maybe you didn’t hear me”
Abel reiterates, adroitly drawing the Glock
Locking his elbow and pointing it at her
She jumps, feet off the ground
Abel yells
“Now!”

And racks the pistol
The sound alone chills her blood
But she gets moving nonetheless
One of her hands digs into a pocket
Slaps her keys on the counter
The other retrieves her purse
And she scampers out the door
Faster than either Abel or Tara
Could’ve imagined her going
‘Ding’ sounds that door
They stand there under flickering lights
Waiting until the El Camino revs
And fishtails back onto the road
With a new driver, a new itinerary
And more money with an actual purpose
They don’t contemplate
What the woman will do with the money
Or even the car, for that matter
Let alone possibly reporting them
And what has happened
But out here, living this life
Money can be just what she’s needed
Or the weight could be more
Than she’s ready to bear

*Regardless, I feel that
It’s the first morally right thing
To have done this whole time*

*And with that thought in mind
 It's actually a little unnerving
 But I feel Tara's smile
 Warm my face
 Without her skin touching mine
 Until the El Camino's engine
 Is something of the past
 Arrowed into the distance
 She and I have just inherited
 A shit-storm of antagonism
 And a little gas station
 With satiation within reach
 But true satisfaction
 Somewhere out that door
 And I feel determined to find it
 With nobody but Tara
 At my side to share the discovery*

"Let's fill these empty stomachs"
 Abel murmurs
 Parting a strand of Tara's hair
 From sweat-adhesive skin
 "And get some water on our wounds"
 "Do you want me to kiss yours?"
 Tara asks
 Abel smiles "I'd be honored"



*The snacks helped
The water helped
Hell, Abel and I
Even shared a Yoohoo
And for once in a long time
T-I-M-E
There is a clock readily available
This one, analog
Lost in a digital world
Yet at peace in its home
This place, pure country
Middle of nowhere they say
And yet it is somewhere
For Abel and I
It seems to have been just
What we've been looking for
And this clock up on the wall
Behind the counter
Actually fucking works
We don't pay much attention to it*

*However, it is there regardless
 Offering its services
 Even if we choose to ignore it
 Nonetheless, I'd say
 About ten minutes pass
 Between us snacking and drinking
 Our water and chocolate milk
 Before we hear a familiar sound
 A discordance in the distance
 As far as we'd like it to stay
 It sends chills down my spine
 And makes pallid my skin
 More so than it already is—
 Fervor scolds my veins
 It feels great*

The sirens are clearly police
 Far off but within earshot
 Means they'll reach the gas station
 In under five minutes
 The sound at first seemed a surreal echo
 But as the seconds pass
 Anvils of their own in space
 Another invisible weight
 Materializes on their shoulders
 Possible outcomes manifest in their heads
 And, sharing a glance
 They exchange these thoughts
 Without uttering a sound
 For the first time, Abel picks up the keys
 Left by the clerk earlier
 He laughs out loud
 "These are house keys" he says
 He looks up at the puzzled Tara

“These are her fucking house keys”
 Abel repeats, grinning, head shaking
 “We...we never did check to see
 If she even had a car” Tara murmurs
 “All the way out here” Abel says
 “One would only assume” He sighs
 “Maybe she gets dropped off” Tara suggests
 “Probably” Abel sighs again
 His exhalation long and guttural

What the hell now?
I look out through the poster-plastered
Windows of the convenience store
And it's as if my pivotal sight
Amplifies the sirens encroaching
So, what? The old lady bested us
Good for her
And good for us—
No, better for us

Abel turns back to face Tara
 And she's half-smiling
 Lips chapped yet damp
 He finds subtle motion in her dark eyes
 And picks her up by the waist
 Sets her down on the countertop
 Her bare legs dangling off the edge
 “My life is worth it” Abel whispers
 “You're beautiful”
 He smiles and leans in
 They kiss, Tara says “Mirror”
 And they kiss again
 This time his hands going to her face
 And their lips releasing the Krakens

That are their tongues
 A fight to the death
 Or a playful wrestle of companions
 No one can tell
 Abel and Tara don't even know
 Perhaps why they're enjoying it so much

*I feel a dark verve
 Gallop through me
 Our lips disengage, tongues retract
 He smiles and pats my thigh
 Goes to check the window
 Our wounds are dressed
 But for what now?
 Prepare for another wave
 I suppose
 And then I hear his voice
 Say he can see them approaching
 A horde of the fucking cops
 At least half a dozen black-and-whites
 Their sirens screaming
 Disturbing the peace of the countryside
 Somehow far more than we ever did*

While Abel adheres himself
 To the window nearest the door
 Peering through the cruddy glass
 Surveying the gradual approach
 Of several heated, wailing squad cars
 Tara removes the Glock from her shorts
 Puts it to the side
 And lies back on the counter
 Her hands sweeping her own stomach
 Up past her chest

Beyond the limits of her face
 Fingers coursing through hair
 Elbows locking in full stretch
 She tilts her head back
 Arching her back briefly
 Gaze swinging from the ceiling to
 Behind the counter
 She sees a door ajar, with a sign
 “Employees only”
 Probing her curiosity, Tara rolls over
 Onto her stomach
 Hands grappling the lip of the counter
 Arms pulling her to the edge
 She guides her gaze under
 And a smile strokes her face
 She retrieves the gun taped there
 A .45-caliber P99
 Compact but powerful
 Tara sits up, checks the magazine
 Racks the slide
 Catches Abel’s attention
 Furthermore his gaze, upon saying
 “Not bad for the middle-of-nowhere”
 And Abel spins to look her way
 They share big, toothy grins
 And sparks in their eyes

*I love you, Tara
 We kiss, still smiling
 And I go behind the counter
 See an ajar door
 That Tara takes note of
 Go further to investigate
 Not much behind it*

*A prison within a prison
 Small breakroom, tiny table
 No windows, two chairs
 I don't see any nooses
 Maybe they keep those hidden
 There is a row of lockers though—
 First two are empty
 Cobwebs in the corners
 The third, however
 The third*

Tara's ears catch the distinctive sound
 Of a shotgun slide cocking
 She almost laughs
 And then Abel exits the breakroom
 Carrying a sawed-off Mossberg
 "Not bad, indeed" he says
 Abel meets Tara on the other side
 They kiss some more
 He helps her off the counter
 They stand side by side, straight, tall

*Abel is holding the shotgun
 In his left hand
 While his right arm lassos my waist
 Our hips touch
 Our gazes are joined
 And yet we do not face each other
 Instead we're staring outside
 The P99 is in my right hand
 The Glock dangling in my left
 Sandwiched between us
 And we watch as the cop cars arrive
 Three roar past, sirens screeching*

*Voices of the heretic
 However, four more stay behind
 Tires squealing
 Ashen smoke spitting into the air
 These four pull under the gas station
 Arrowheads aiming right at us
 How they know or why they believe
 Abel and I—the culprits
 Of all the beautiful havoc outside
 These past several days—
 Are inside the convenience store
 Is, well, rather inconvenient for us
 But neither Abel nor I
 Trouble ourselves with inquisition
 We accept the clear
 However corrupt it is*

*Three beyond us
 Four to stay behind
 And poke around
 What happens to be our keep
 Well, so be it
 Tara and I together
 They could have shotguns
 For all I care—
 Fuck me, they have shotguns—
 Two cops per car pour out
 Barking orders at each other
 Half of them full-sized shotguns
 The others with revolvers and Glocks
 Whether this is coldblooded revenge
 For Gary and Donnie
 Or true-to-heart justice
 I could not care less*

And I can sense the energy
Emanating from Tara
She stands beside me
But I feel as if she's inside me
And I'm inside her
And the world is soon to be
Inside the both of us

"This is some serious, heavy shit"
 Abel grumbles, albeit smiling
 "It always is with you" Tara simpers
 Aiming the P99 with one hand
 "And I wouldn't have it any other way"
 "Neither would I, love" Abel says
 And they kiss once more
 Yet somehow for the first time
 And that kiss never fades
 It only gets louder, turns over
 Into an array of smiles and screams
 Gunshots and explosions of appetite
 Pain and ecstasy and a warcry
 That will take them beyond the unknown
 Into each other's skin and eyes
 Wherever it is they want to go
 In whatever form they desire

