

# Excerpts from THE LAST VISIT

## Toward Your Understanding

You believe your father is made of stone,  
a tower whose strength is silence.  
Neither of you speak. This is not unusual.  
Today he walks ahead, leads you  
down Cranberry Lane, to White Horse,  
where you are outside the dead man's house.

Your father says, "He shot himself in there,"  
a white house with a browning lawn  
and a single twisted-up crepe myrtle.  
And maybe because it looks so familiar—  
like your own home—this does not frighten you.  
Your father says, "He shot himself in the head."

He leads you to the window, grips your waist  
and lifts you to the darkened glass.  
Your reflection fades into the room,  
sparsely furnished, gray carpet, white walls.  
You see it there above the sofa: a blossom  
of blood, a ring fanning out to nothing.

In the center of the plaster: a small black hole.  
It seems, somehow, impossibly empty.  
When you're lowered back to the ground,  
you feel the neighborhood beneath your feet.  
Even the bone-white sun is fading faster  
than it should. You know it will be dark soon.

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## Rubáiyát for My Father

This is how the cycle starts.  
It binds together both our hearts  
and leaves the tender skin of my back  
a document of jagged marks.

I'm beaten first, then made to strip  
and show you where I've met the whip.  
You sterilize the harm you've done  
like steady handed craftsmanship.

But after the swabs and alcohol,  
it's like you've never seen, at all,  
the fresh wounds on my shoulder blades  
or all these bloody cotton balls.

The scars get tangled on my skin  
despite the cool of lanolin.  
You say you love me, yes, you do,  
but love has worn me ribbon-thin.

You are my father, but you are a fiend—  
the one who cut and the one who cleaned,  
who turned that taste of suffering  
into a casual routine.

Forgive me now. This ghost I hold  
is often angry, often cold,  
and longs to rip the stitches out  
before the wounds can go untold.

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## On the Dred Ranch Road Just Off 283

Stars are fired up like scattershot.  
The howls of wolves that saunter near extinction  
echo across the plains until they're not.  
All of them are headed one direction.

My father was a drinker. So am I—  
an echo of a tune in drunken time.  
The bottle is an instrument, and rye  
the amber music spilling over. I'm

thinking about the rhythm of decline:  
he measured his in knuckles, hookers, drinks.  
I start to wonder how I'll measure mine,  
the ballad of the triple-whisky jinx,

but the wind begins to sigh of tired things.  
I pull the bottle from the bag. It sings.