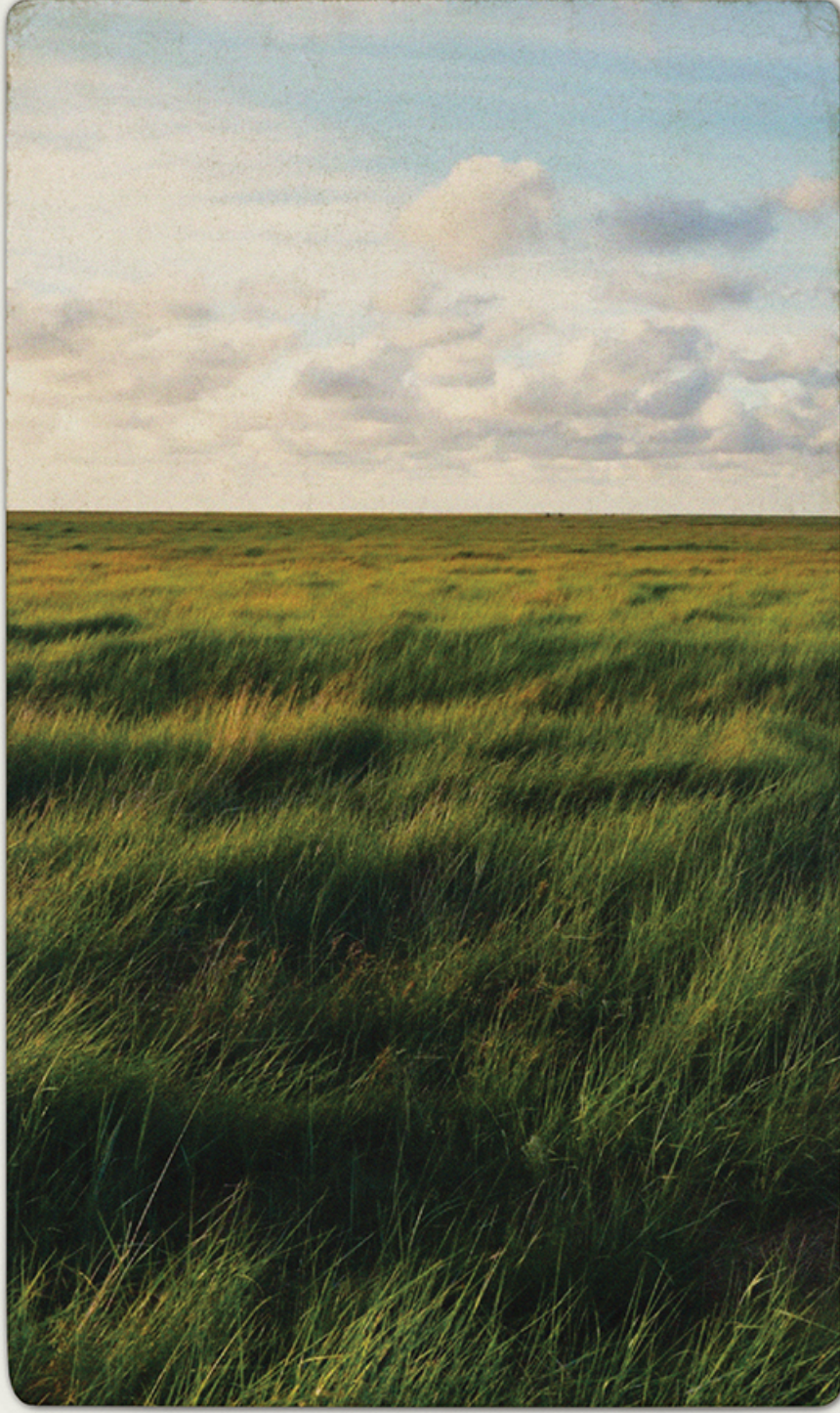


*DECLARATIONS OF HUNGER*

*SMITH — DECLARATIONS OF HUNGER*



*POEMS REED SMITH — DECLARATIONS*

*OF HUNGER POEMS REED*

*Declarations of Hunger*  
© 2025 Reed Smith

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# RIVER OF LOVE

The river of love is unsuited to loving well.  
In one, it traps and drowns a man  
trying to learn how to swim. It pulls him  
down like a bucket on a rope,

a greedy lens of current going past.  
Its efficiency is astonishing. Nothing  
ever really ends up given back.  
It repeats the curse. It traps the orgasm.

Annoyed with the field, it cuts  
the field in half. It unlocks stones  
that have no keyhole. Drink its water  
and the universe expands invisibly

inside you. Rubble of cold stars.  
A heart of Mars glass. If you cross it  
you can count yourself as changed.  
A toe goes in; a shell or husk returns.

# THE EVIDENCE AT HAND

They drove east out of the borrowed city.  
To find jobs. To start new lives.  
Somewhere along the way they killed  
a young couple traveling the country.

They burned their van. They murdered  
a botanist. His “gentle soul” bloomed  
to ash. As for their own bodies,  
their special treatment was no less

loathsome. Self-inflicted gunshots  
in a marsh near Gillam, Manitoba.  
On TV, I listen to what their mothers say.  
The grief of the killer’s families

strikes me like cold rain. They have  
stepped into nothing they paid for  
but own it just the same. They are  
somber, pale, waxy as the dead,

but you can see their anger like dirty  
light leaking through a painted bulb.  
Later, at home, they find it all over  
again. The town will talk

like it always does. It takes night  
to silence the rumor mill churning  
its clattering belts. A long darkness,  
the kind that constricts, choking out

the trees, the cold smoke, the snow  
on the frozen streets. It winds out  
in webs, four corners, farther even,  
to where evidence is no longer

something that proves any facts,  
like a poem about the way the world  
works, or these words, these  
words,

these words.

# THE VOICES OF THE MIND

They ambush a door left open,  
a black felt hat tossed on a bed.  
They remind you they made a point  
of saying *enjoy it while you can*.

And also:

*You are not that important. It is not always about you.*

They pause while you take a breath, a whole  
troop of unreadable selves  
carrying their subjects to the fire.

I'd like to think that even in your worst way,  
you are true to them. The words you say  
jibe with actions committed,  
the *Shit!* you curse  
with that you step in,  
proving you no liar, good or bad.

Like a trick of the light, they surprise you.  
They call it love. You try to mean it.



# FALL IN THE CONEJOS

Iron gives way to salt.  
Great lakes of it burn the sky  
with its mirrors.

The river fragments into an academy  
of eyes. Grass blurs in the sulfur-bog.  
Shivering willows blaze  
the last yellows of October.  
Cattle pass in burlap shadow.

Mushrooms rise from manure,  
lifting the desiccated fecal discs.  
Their gills are clotted in the  
currant jelly of frozen gypsum.  
They are veined like marble,  
edges dimmed to a pale half-glow.

The smell of blood. High vapor,  
dark pines. Frost on granite.  
Leaf harem of roseate confetti.  
A great mass of division  
below the feet. Fractals of dark  
plates forcing the land apart.

Clouds loosely bandaged in the sky.  
The shock of the cold—a handful  
of nails. Resinous river  
with useful tools that pull  
and push, battering rocks  
when the snow melts,  
winnowed down to wizened crusts,  
strange codes, geometric shadows.

# RECURRENCES

September sunlight scattered on rotting  
gourds picked over by a raven  
who visits every fall carrying with him a dusting  
of coal ash from the city.

~

Rushmore. The Moorish Lions. Bolivar's dreams.  
Mica schist, fine-veined granite.  
Water wrinkles faces in the fountains.  
Terminal bodies of tin cans tremble on electrodes of sunlight.

~

The living flatter the dead. They ease them down,  
empty their pockets. A girl with no clothes  
runs naked down a road. A boy whose head is scorched  
and bloody sits patiently, hair matted in brick dust.

~

I try not to listen to the woman who tells  
her daughter, "Don't be afraid, let's pray,"  
as naturally as if rising from sleep.  
The airplane's fuselage pitted with noise like a gourd-rattle.

~

Bolivar's dreams rose from the Century of Lights—  
cold shards of ruined light eaten  
like moons of scoured ash. Lunar moths in the porchlight  
flutter over squashes rotting in our garden.

# DECLARATIONS OF HUNGER

*after A. E. Backus*

He paints a bird and a snake.

It is midday  
in a field. One glistens cruelly. One tries not  
to give itself away.

The fractal swath of deliverance  
glitters in the ocean's current.

Wind hammers inside the echo chamber's hood.

Wings, like dusty Sanskrit, blur.

They tangle in a whisper.  
A heron becomes a wren. A rock becomes a weed.  
The grass shakes its sequined blades.

Declarations of hunger have been made.

# COYOTES

Early barks like rifle shots slapping  
flatwater. A kinned pack hunting.  
Arroyo unaffiliated with the grade

gathering its moraine shadows  
before dawn, slabs of pursed  
pinons prospecting western distances,

all for water, the ware  
of the next century. Suddenly it ends.  
Talking becomes familiar again.

The killing grounds lifted back  
to the sun's tradition.  
Horizon combed neatly by fire.

The lineman's generator kicks  
up blue exhaust, shivering eels  
slippery as grease.

The demented housecat  
comes back slopped in loose dust.  
New choirs start preternaturally.

# PEAU D'ORANGE

She survived what inflation did  
in the 30's to those families  
with one car, no gas money, no jobs.  
Her sister ran off with a fraud.  
Her father shot squirrels in the yard.  
He did telegraphy for the railroad.  
In Fiji, a woman's body turned up.  
Colorado Springs had three that year.  
All other people's daughters.  
She stopped looking, rode down  
to Dallas on the Texas Eagle.  
Imported names of barons  
on the ivy-laced street signs.  
Looking back, she was shrewd  
by upper middle-class standards.  
She ate two small meals a day.  
Skipped lunch for the sacrament  
of menthol smoke. Crystalized  
the lungs, her doctors said,  
ate her from the inside out.  
Their work-a-day words  
pulled from ancient Latin,  
sometimes French.  
Their offices swam in a thin,  
blue haze. Ashtrays  
and magazines conjured order  
in the fever-choked waiting room,  
where death filtered in  
as sunlight under the door.

# JACK'S HOUSE

The closets stink of termite chaff.  
Cockroach malt. Sunlight's lacy patterns  
stain the plaster's castrated hide.

Folios of seeds folded tight in paper beaks.  
Dust tames the pitch of the funeral bowlers.

It's half slapdash, squatting on syphilitic

pier and beam, quivering on haunches  
rotting through after years of nights

where stars tested exposure without

the means of light. Powdered lime  
bruises the petrified Okies sleeping

under the marigolds. The last century is

canned fresh. Catfish glitter in the black  
pond. Nitrate's cold laureates struggle

to breathe. The children don't come back.

Ruin streams in. The once-fallow cornfields  
chopped into dead quarters.

Slaughter seeps into the skin.



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