

Table of Contents

The Bone Church
Brooklyn August
The Dark Man
Donovan's Brain
For Owen
The Hardcase Speaks
Harrison State Park '68
In the Key, Chords of Dawn
Paranoid - A Chant
Silence

Table of Contents

The Bone Church
Brooklyn August
The Dark Man
Donovan's Brain
For Owen
The Hardcase Speaks
Harrison State Park '68
In the Key, Chords of Dawn
Paranoid - A Chant
Silence

THE BONE CHURCH

Stephen King

When traveling to the heart of darkness, terror is not an emotion - it's a destination.

If you want to hear, buy me another drink.

(Ah, this is slop - slop, I tell you - but never mind; what isn't?)

There were thirty-two of us went into that greensore
and only three who rose above it.

We were thirty days in the green, and only one of us came out.

Three rose above the green, three made it to the top:

Manning and Revois and me. And what does that book say?

The famous one? "Only I am left to tell you."

I'll die in bed, as most obsessed whoresons do.

And do I mourn Manning? Balls! It was his money
put us there, his will that drove us on, death by death.

But did he die in bed? Not that one! I saw to it!

Now he worships in that bone church forever. Life is grand!

(What slop is this? Still - buy me another, do. Buy me two!

"Put another nickel in... the nickelodeon - - "

In other words I'll talk for whiskey; if you want me
to shut up, switch me to champagne.

Talk is cheap, silence is dear, my dear.

What was I saying?)

Twenty-nine dead on the march, and one a woman.

Fine tits she had, but an ass like an English saddle!

We found her facedown in the dead fire one morning,

an ash-baby smoked at the cheeks and throat.

Never burnt; fire must have been cold when she went in.

She talked the whole voyage and died without a sound;

what's better than being human? Do you say so?

No? Then balls to you, and your mother, too;

if she'd had two she'd been a fucking King.

Anthropologist, arr, so she said. Didn't look like no anthropologist when we pulled 'er out of the ashes with char on her cheeks and the whites of her eyes dusted gray with soot. Not a mark on her otherwise. Dorrance said it might've been a stroke and hwe as as close to a doctor as we had, that pansy-whore. For the love of God bring whiskey, for life's a trudge without it!

Every day the green did 'em down. Carson died of a stick in his boot. His foot swole up and when we cut away the goddam boot leather, his toesies were as black as the squid's ink that drove Manning's heart. Reston and Polgoy, they were stung by spiders big as your fist; Ackerman bit by a snake what dropped out of a tree where it hung like a lady's fur stole draped on a branch. Bit its poison into Ackerman's nose. How strong a throe, you ask? Try this: He ripped his own snoot clean off! Tore it away like a rotten each off a branch and died spitin' his own dyin' face! Goddam life, I say, and if you

can't laugh you might as well laugh anyway. It ain't a sad world unless you're sane, you know.

Javier fell off a plank bridge and when we hauled him out and he couldn't breathe so Dorrance tried to kiss him back to life and sucked from his throat a leech as big as a hothouse tomato. It popped free like a cork from a bottle and split between 'em; sprayed both with the claret we live on (for we're all alcoholics that way, if you see my figure) and when the Frenchman died raving, Manning said the leeches'd gone to his brain. As for me, I hold no opinion on that. All I know is that goddam Javier's eyes wouldn't stay shut but went on bulging in and out even after he was an hour cold. off a branch and died

spitin' his own dyin' face! Goddam life, I say,

and if you can't laugh you might as well laugh anyway.

It ain't a sad world unless you're sane, you know.

Javier fell off a plank bridge and when we

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the leeches'd gone to his brain. As for me, I hold no opinion on

that.

All I know is that goddam Javier's eyes wouldn't stay shut
but went on

bulging in and out even after he was an hour cold.

Something in there, all right, arr, yes there was!

And all the while the macaws screamed at the monkeys

and the monkeys screamed at the macaws and both

screamed for the blue sky they couldn't see,

for it was buried in the goddam green.

Is this whiskey or diarrhea in a glass?

There was one of those suckers in the Frenchie's pantstu

did I tell you? You know what that one ate, don't you?

It was Dorrance himself who went next; we were

climbing by then, but still in the green. He fell

in a gorge and we could hear the snap. Broke his neck,

twenty six years of age, engaged to be married, case closed.

Arr, ain't life grand? Life's a sucker in the throat,

life's the gorge we all fall in (or choke on), it's a soup

and we all end up vegetables. Ain't I philosophical?

Never mind. It's too late to count the dead,

and I'm too drunk. In the end we got there.

Just say that.

Climbed that high embankment out of all that
sizzling green after we buried Rostoy, Timmons,
the Texantul forgot his nametuand Dorrance
and a couple of others. In the end most went down
of some fever that boiled their skin and turned it green.

At the end it was only Manning, Revois and me.

We got the fever too, but we got better;
killed it before it killed us.

Only I ain't never really got better. Now whiskey's
my quinine, what I take for the shakes, so buy
me another before I forget my manners
and cut your fucking throat. I might even
drink what comes out, so be wise, sonny,
and trot it over, goddam your young cheeks.

There was a road we came to, even Manning agreed
it was, and wide enough for elephants if the ivory hunters
hadn't picked clean the plains and the jungles beyond 'em
back when gas was still a nickel.

("Put another nickel intutu" Arr, nevermind.)

It bore up, that road, and we bore up with it on tilted slabs
of stone a million years peeled free of mother earth,
jumping one to another like frogs in the sun, Revois
still burning with the fever and metuoh I was light!
Like milkweed gauze on a breeze, you knowtuyet
still I saw it all. My mind was as clear then as clean water,
for I was as young then as horrid nowtuyes, I see
how you look at me, but you needn't wince, for
it's your own future you see on this side o' the table.
We climbed above the birds and there was the end,
a stone tongue poked straight into the blue.
Manning broke into a run and we ran after, Revois
trotting a right smart, sick as he was.
(But he wasn't sick longtuhee!)
We looked down and saw what we saw.
Manning turned red at the sight, and why not?
For greed's a fever, too.
He grabbed me by the rag that was once a shirt
and asked if it was just a dream. When I said I saw
what he saw, he turned to Revois.

But before Revois could say aye or nay, we heard the thunder
coming up from the greenroof we'd left behind,
like a storm turned upside down. Or say
like all of earth had caught that fever that stalked us
and was sick in its bowels. I asked Manning what he heard
and Manning said nothing. He was too busy looking
into that cleft, down a thousand feet of ancient air
into the church below: a million years of bone and tusk,
a whited sepulchre of eternity, a thrashpit of prongs
such as you'd see if hell burned dry to the slag of its cauldron.

Arr! Yes!

You expected to see bodies impaled on the
ancient thorns of that sunny tomb. There were none,
but the thunder was coming, rolling up the ground
instead of down from the sky. The stones shook
beneath our heels as they burst free of the green
that took so manytuRostoy with his mouth harp,
Dorrance who sang along, the anthropologist
with the ass like an English saddle, twenty-six others.
They came, those gaunt ghosts, and shook the greenroof

from their feet, and in a gray wave; elephants no zoo ever held stampeding sideways from the green cradle of time.

Towering among 'em (believe what you want) were mammoths from the dead age when man was not, their tusks in corkscrews and their eyes as red as whips of sorrow;

wrapped around their wrinkled legs were jungle vines.

One cometuyes!tuwith a flower stuck

in a fold of his chest hidetulike a boutonniere!

Revois screamed and put his hand over his eyes.

Manning said "I don't see that." (He sounded like a man explaining to a fucking traffic cop.)

I pulled 'em aside and we all three stumbled into a stony cunt near the edge. From there we watched 'em come: a tide in the face of reality that made you wish for blindness and glad for sight.

They went past us and over us, never slowing, the ones behind driving the ones before, and down they went, trumpeting their way to suicide, crashing into the bones of their oblivion a dusty mile below.

Hours it went on, those endless convulsions of tumbling death;
trumpets all the way down, a brass orchestra,
diminishing. The dust and smell fo their shit
near choked us, and in the end Revois fell mad.

Stood up, whether to run away or to join 'em
I never knew which, but join 'em he did,
headfirst and down with his boot heels in the sky and
all the nailheads winking.

One arm waved. The other... one of those giant flat feet
tore it off his body and the arm followed after, fingers
waving: "Bye-bye!" and "Bye-bye!" and "So long, boys!"

Har!

I leaned out to see and it was a sight to remember, all right,
how he sprayed in pinwheels that hung in the air
after he was gone, then turned pink and floated away
on a breeze that smelled of rotten carnations.

His bones with the others by now, and where's my drink?

But not with a single new one; the only new bones were his.

Do you see what I say? Listen again, damn you:

His, but no others.

Nothing down there after the last of the giants had passed us
except for the bone church, which was as it was,
with one blot of red, and that was Revois.

For that was a stampede of ghosts or memories,
and who knows which haunts men the more? Manning got up
trembling, said our fortunes were made (as if he
didn't already have one).

"And what about what you just saw?" I asked.

"Would you bring others to see such a holy thing?

Why, next thing you know the Pope himself will be
pissin' holy water over the side!" But Manning
only shook his head like a fool, and held up hands
without a speck of dust on them although not a minute
past we'd been choking on it by the bale,
and coated with it from top to toe.

Said it was hallucination

we'd seen, brought on by fever and stinkwater.

Said again that our fortunes were made, and
laughed. The whoreson, that laugh was his undoing.

I saw that he was mad or I was and one of us

would have to die. You know which one it was,
since here I sit before you, drunk, with hair that once
was black hanging in my eyes.

He said, "Don't you see, you fooltutu"

And said no more, for the rest was just a scream.

Balls to him!

And balls to your grinning face!

I don't remember how I got back; it's a

dream of green with dark faces in it,

then a dream of blue with light faces in it,

and now I wake in the night in this city

where not one in ten dreams of what

lies beyond their lives for the eyes they

use to dream with are shut, as Manning's

were, until the end, when not all the bank accounts in hell

or Switzerland (they may be the same) could save him.

I wake with my liver bellowing, and in the dark

I hear the thunder of those great gray ghosts rising

out of the green roof like a storm set loose on the earth

and I smell the dust and shit, and when they

break free into the sky of their undoing, I see
the ancient fans of their ears and their eyes.
There's more to life than this; there are maps
inside your maps and time beyond your time.
It's still there, the bone church, and I'd like to
go back and find it again, so I could throw myself
over and be done this comedy. Now turn away
your sheep's face before I turn it away for you.
Arr, it's a dirty place, this reality,
and there's no religion in it, so buy me a drink,
goddam you. We'll toast elephants that never were.

BROOKLYN AUGUST

Stephen King

(For Jim Bishop)

In Ebbets Field the crabgrass grows

(where Alston managed)

row on row

as the day's axle turns into twilight

I still see them, with the green smell

of just-mown infield grass heavy

in the darkening end of the day:

picked out by the right-field floods, just

turned on and already assaulted by

battalions of circling moths

and bugs on the night shift;

below, old men and offduty taxi drivers

are drinking big cups of Schlitz in the 75C/ seats,

this Flatbush as real as velvet Harlem streets

where jive packs the juke in the June of '56.

In Ebbets Field the infield's slow

and seats are empty, row on row

Hodges is hulked over first, glove stretched

to touch the throw from Robinson at third,

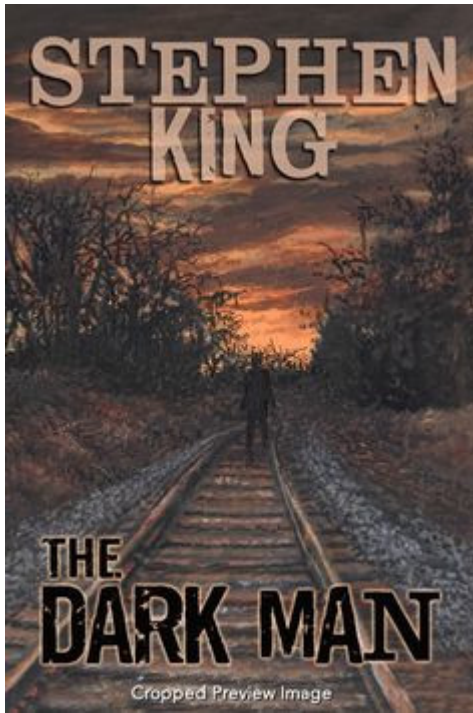
the batters' boxes float in the ghost-glow
of this sky-filled Friday evening
(Musial homered early, Flatbush is down by 2).
Newcombe trudged to an early shower through
a shower of popcorn and newspaper headlines.
Carl Erskine is in now and chucking hard but
Johnny Podres and Clem Labine are heating
in case he blows up late;
he can, you know, they all can
In Ebbets Field they come and go
and play their innings, blow by blow
time's called in the dimness of the 5th
someone chucked a beer at Sandy Amoros in right
he spears the empty cup without a word
and hands it to a groundkeeper chewing Mail Pouch
while the faceless fans cry down juicy Brooklyn vowels,
a plague on both their houses.
Pee Wee Reese leans on his knees west of second
Campanella gives the sign
with my eyes closed I see it all

smell steamed franks and 8 pm dirt

can see those heavenly shades of evening

they swim with angels above the stadium dish

as Erskine winds and wheels and throws low-inside:



THE DARK MAN

Stephen King

Published in "Ubris", 1969 and later in Moth, 1970.

I have stridden the fuming way
of sun-hammered tracks and
smashed cinders;

I have ridden rails
and bumed sterno in the
gantry silence of hob jungles:

I am a dark man.

I have ridden rails
and passed the smuggerly
of desperate houses with counterfeit chimneys
and heard from the outside
the inside clink of cocktail ice
while closed doors broke the world -
and over it all a savage sickle moon
that bummed my eyes with bones of light.

I have slept in glaring swamps
where musk-reek rose

to mix with the sex smell of rotting cypress stumps
where witch fire clung in sunken
psycho spheres of baptism -
and heard the suck of shadows
where a gutted columned house
leeches with vines
speaks to an overhung mushroom sky
I have fed dimes to cold machines
in all night filling stations
while traffic in a mad and flowing flame
streaked red in six lanes of darkness,
and breathed the cleaver hitchhike wind
within the breakdown lane with thumb levelled
and saw shadowed faces made complacent
with heaters behind safety glass
faces that rose like complacent moons
in riven monster orbits.
and in a sudden jugular flash
cold as the center of a sun
I forced a girl in a field of wheat

and left her sprawled with the virgin bread

a savage sacrifice

and a sign to those who creep in

fixed ways:

I am a dark man.

DONOVAN'S BRAIN

Stephen King

Published in "Moth", 1970

Shratt came on limping

obsessed

he tried to run down a little girl

and there was a drag of pain

in his left

kidney

horror

he signed checks with Donovan's name

and made mad love with Donovan's woman.

poor Shratt!

warped and sucked by desert wine

raped by the brain of that monstrous man

shadowed by his legless shadow

Shratt, driven by a thing

(you know about that Thing, don't you?)

in an electric tank:

(AMPS-AMPS-AMPS-AMPS-)

demented paranoia

from "BEYOND THE GRAVE! !"

but the tragedy

was Shratt -oh,

I could weep for Shratt.

FOR OWEN

Stephen King

Walking to school you ask me

what other schools have grades.

I get as far as Fruit Street and your eyes go away.

As we walk under these yellow trees

you have your army lunch box under one arm and your

short legs, dressed in combat fatigues,

make your shadow into a scissors

that cuts nothing on the sidewalk.

You tell me suddenly that all the students there are fruits.

Everyone picks on the blueberries because they are so small.

The bananas, you say, are patrol boys.

In your eyes I see homerooms of oranges,

assemblies of apples.

All, you say, have arms and legs

and the watermelons are often tardy.

They waddle, and they are fat.

“Like me,” you say.

I could tell you things but better not.

That watermelon children cannot tie their own shoes;

the plums do it for them.

Or how I steal your face—

steal it, steal it, and wear it for my own.

It wears out fast on my face.

It's the stretching that does it.

I could tell you that dying's an art

and I am learning fast.

In that school I think you have already

picked up your own pencil

and begun to write your name.

Between now and then I suppose we could

someday play you truant and drive over to Fruit Street

and I could park in a rain of these October leaves

and we could watch a banana escort the last tardy watermelon

through those tall doors.

THE HARDCASE SPEAKS

Stephen King

From Contraband #2

In fields and christless allies the psalter is handed
greedily around with purple bottles of cheap port
punctuated by the sodium lightness glare of freights
rising past hobo cinder gantries and pitless bramble hollows:
Dukane, Grand Rapids, Cedar Forks, Harlow, Dover-Foxcroft,
names from the back platform of the A-train
so don't gimme that shit don't gimme that crap
I'll put the hoodoo on you, I can do it, it comes in a can
in 1954 in a back alley behind a bar they
found a lady cut in four pieces and written in her juice on the bricks
above
he had scrawled PLEASE STOP ME BEFORE I KILL AGAIN in
letters that leaned and
draggled so they called him The Cleveland Torso Murderer and
never caught him,
it figures
all these liberals are brainless
if you want to see jeans just peak into any alabaster

gravel pit in Mestalinás

all these liberals have hairy shirts

Real life is in the back row of a 2nd run movie house in Utica, have you been

there

this guy with his hair greased back was drunk

and getting drunker when I sat down and his face kept twisting; he cried I'm a

goddamn stupid sonofabitch but doan choo try to tell me nothin I didn't he

might have come from Cleveland

if the stars are right I can witch you I can make your hair fall out

You don't need hairy jeans to stand outside a Safeway

store in Smalls Falls and watch a cloud under the high

blue sky ripple the last shadows of summer over the asphalt parking lot two

acres wide

A real hack believes blackboards are true

for myself I would turn them all soft like custard scoop

them feed them to blackbirds save corn for murderers

in huge and ancient Buicks sperm grows on seatcovers

and flows upstream toward the sound of Chuck Berry

once I saw a drunk in Redcliff and he had stuffed a newspaper in his
mouth he

jigged jubilantly

around a two shadowed light pole

I could gun you down with magic nose bullets

There are still drugstore saints

Still virgins pedalling bikes with playing cards affixed to the rear
spokes

with clothespins

The students have made things up

The liberals have shit themselves and produced a satchel-load of
smelly

numbers

Radicals scratch secret sores and pore over back numbers

bore a little hole in your head sez I insert a candle

light a light for Charlie Starkweather and let

your little light shine shine shine

play bebop

buy styrofoam dice on 42nd street

eat sno-cones and read Lois Lane

Learn to do magic like me and we will drive to Princeton

in an old Ford with four retread skins and a loose manifold that boils
up the

graphite stink of freshcooked

exhaust we will do hexes with Budweiser pentagrams and old

Diamond matchboxes

chew some Red Man and let the juice down your chin when you spit

sprinkle sawdust on weird messes

buy some plastic puke at Atlantic City

throw away your tape player and gobble Baby Ruths

Go now. I think you are ready.

HARRISON STATE PARK '68

Stephen King

Published in "Ubris", 1968

"All mental disorders are simply detective strategies for handling difficult life situations."

Thomas Szasz

"And I feel like homemade shit."

Ed Sanders

- Can you do it ?

She asked shrewdly

From the grass where her nylon legs in gartered splendor
made motions.

- Can you do it ?

Ah!

What do I say?

What are the cools?

Jimmy Dean?

Robert Mitchum?

Soupy Sales?

Modern Screen Romances is a tent on the grass Over a dozen
condoms

in a quiet box

and the lady used to say (before she passed away)

- If you can't be an athlete, be an athletic supporter.

The moon is set.

A cloud scum has covered the stars.

A man with a gun has passed

this way

BUT -

we do not need your poets.

Progressed beyond them to Sony

Westinghouse

Cousin Brucie

the Doors

and do I dare

mention Sonny and Cher ?

I remember Mickey Rooney as Pretty Boy Floyd

and he was the shortest Pretty Boy Floyd on record

coughing his enthusiastic guts out in the last

reel.

We have not spilt the blood.

They have spilt the blood.

A little girl lies dead

On the hopscotch grid

No matter

- Can you do it?

She asked shrewdly

With her Playtex living bra cuddling breasts
softer than a handful of wet Fig Newtons.

Old enough to bleed

Old enough to slaughter

The old farmer said

And grinned at the white

Haystack sky

With sweaty teeth

(radiation

radiation

your grandchildren will be monsters)

I remember a skeleton

In Death Valley

A cow in the sunbleached throes of antiseptic death and someone
said:

- Someday there will be skeletons on the median strip of the
Hollywood Freeway staring up at exhaust-sooty pigeons amidst the
flapping ruins of Botany 500

call me Ishmael.

I am a semen.

- Can you do it?

She asked shrewdly

When the worms begin

their midnight creep

and the dew has sunk white to milk the grass...

And the bitter tears

Have no ducts

The eyes have fleshed in.

Only the nose knows that A loser is always the same.

There is a sharp report.

It slices the night cleanly And thumps home with a tincan spannnng!

Against the Speed Limit sign down the road.

Laughter

The clean clear sound of a bolt levered back...

Silence...

Spannnng!

“Aileen, if poachers poached peaches, would the poachers peel the peaches to eat with poached eggs poached before peaches?”

oh don't

don't

please touch me

but don't

don't

and I reach for your hand but touch only the radiating live pencils of
your bones:

— Can you do it?

About this Title

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UNTITLED POEM

Stephen King

In the key-chords of dawn

all waters are depthless.

The fish flash recalls

timberline clefts where water

pours between the rocks of frost.

We live the night and wait

for the day dream

(we fished the Mississippi with

Norville as children

catching mostly crawdaddies from

the brown silk water)

when we say "love is responsibility";

our poles are adrift in a sea of compliments.

Now you fish for me and I for you.

The line, the red bobber, the worm on the hook: the fishing more
than the

eating: bones and scales and gutting knife make a loom of
complexity so we are

forced to say "fishing is responsibility"

and put away our poles.

PARANOID: A CHANT

Stephen King

I can't go out no more.

There's a man by the door

in a raincoat

smoking a cigarette.

But

I've put him in my diary.

and the mailers are all lined up

on the bed, bloody in the glow

of the bar sign next door.

He knows that if I die

(or even drop out of sight)

the diary goes and everyone knows

the CIAs in Virginia.

500 mailers bought from
500 drug counters each one different
and 500 notebooks
with 500 pages in every one.
I am prepared.
I can see him from up here.
His cigarette winks from just
above his trenchcoat collar
and somewhere there's a man on a subway
sitting under a Black Velvet ad thinking my name.
Men have discussed me in back rooms.
If the phone rings there's only dead breath.
In the bar across the street a snubnose
revolver has changed hands in the men's room.
Each bullet has my name on it.
My name is written in back files
and looked up in newspaper morgues.
My mother's been investigated;
thank God she's dead.
They have writing samples

and examine the back loops of pees
and the crosses of tees.

My brother's with them, did I tell you?

His wife is Russian and he
keeps asking me to fill out forms.

I have it in my diary.

Listen—

listen

do listen:

you must listen.

In the rain, at the bus stop,
black crows with black umbrellas
pretend to look at their watches, but
it's not raining. Their eyes are silver dollars.

Some are scholars in the pay of the FBI
most are the foreigners who pour through
our streets. I fooled them
got off the bus at 25th and Lex
where a cabby watched me over his newspaper.
In the room above me an old woman

has put an electric suction cup on her floor.

It sends out rays through my light fixture

and now I write in the dark

by the bar sign's glow.

I tell you I know.

They sent me a dog with brown spots

and a radio cobweb in its nose.

I drowned it in the sink and wrote it up

in folder GAMMA.

I don't look in the mailbox anymore.

The greeting cards are letter-bombs.

(Step away! Goddam you!

Step away, I know tall people!

I tell you I know very tall people!)

The luncheonette is laid with talking floors

and the waitress says it was salt but I know arsenic

when it's put before me. And the yellow taste of mustard

to mask the bitter odor of almonds.

I have seen strange lights in the sky.

Last night a dark man with no face crawled through nine miles

of sewer to surface in my toilet, listening
for phone calls through the cheap wood with
chrome ears.

I tell you, man, I hear.

I saw his muddy handprints
on the porcelain.

I don't answer the phone now,
have I told you that?

They are planning to flood the earth with sludge.

They are planning break-ins.

They have got physicians
advocating weird sex positions.

They are making addictive laxatives
and suppositories that burn.

They know how to put out the sun
with blowguns.

I pack myself in ice—have I told you that?

It obviates their infrascopes.

I know chants and I wear charms.

You may think you have me but I could destroy you

any second now.

Any second now.

Any second now.

Would you like some coffee, my love?

Did I tell you I can't go out no more?

There's a man by the door

in a raincoat.

SILENCE

Stephen King

Published in Moth, 1970

Nothing

but the insect whine of

chemicals moving between

refrigerator walls:

the mind becomes CONFSSIONAL

(enamel)

murder

lurks

I stand with books in hand

the feary silence of fury

waiting

for the furnace to kick on