



# FOUND TIME

ROB HILL

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Cover collage “Interior Grain” by the author.

“At Home in the Crucible,” “Celestial Flux,” “Chosen,” “Passing,” and “Today Is a Good Day to Die”

were inspired by

Leslie Feinberg’s novel, *Stone Butch Blues*.

All flower varieties were mentioned in “Chosen,” and “Passing” was created using concrete image language found in Chapter 15 of Leslie Feinberg’s novel, *Stone Butch Blues*.

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## A NOTHING

A no one. A nothing. A working-class traitor  
staring up at the rain as it falls, wondering

at the Golden Arches soaring victorious  
over Old Glory, against a backdrop of three  
freeways, a mall, and a promise of succor  
and happiness  
suckled from the inverted breasts of a red, white, and  
yellow, post-modern Pagliacci.

A century-old religion dripping syrupy calories  
– glop –  
A beloved national pastime.

Not even a failure. A never-was waiting  
for anything to happen in a town  
planned by railroad money and farmers,  
aircraft machinists and war, then warehouse  
workers and faster and faster food.

Emblazoned below the horizon, a full moon  
of innuendo, makes them second  
guess the reason we can't see the stars  
at night from the yard.

Hanging fixed in the sky like a bisected  
sun pinioned, frozen in time. "We've analyzed  
your needs and found what you've been missing..."

"It was inside you all along..."

Or else it's beef tallow.

## AFTER THE GOLD RUSH

As the sun loomed low over the pacific  
at the Monterey Mom and Pop Festival,  
1967, someone strung along  
two bobcat kittens in the back  
of a Dodge van and Someone else set  
their music alight and billfolds flew open  
to the tune of several solid decades  
of subtractive blues

Now, in a canyon hidden from welkin,  
one star visible at a time, my night  
perspective has narrowed to first and maybe  
third, and definitely university,  
but I can't go downtown without hearing  
about music cities and culture  
and cash or credit and a bag surcharge.

Tell me again about how proud you are,  
I'll tell you again how sorry I am that I came.

## LAST OF THE MOHICANS

Drastic zippers and straps slide free  
Across the young man's pants as he sallies  
Lame down the street, slip slap, slip slap.

Aeons of american dreamers filled their socks  
With soil on this grey concrete boulevard, trading  
Footsteps in the Great Indian North before  
Bringing a heat wave with them there, too.

Now, his filthy black leather jacket drags  
And we hear it all the way in London,  
New York, and Tokyo. In the future,

where we root around, ransacking  
answers to problems we couldn't then see.

The young man shines bright for a second, like a missed  
weed in the cut grass. He hopes he is not  
one of them. And he hopes he is not alone.

#### TIRED-EYED CALF

Voices that sound like tin-type photos echo  
softly off the bathroom walls. Silver white  
dying pinholes flicker and fail  
in the thin dawn sun. Warmth

envelops my body. Tight eyes creak  
and narrow and tell you, you are not  
where you are supposed to be; washing away

the day's sins while replaying the hits that made them  
painful. A baptism in bad news  
inaugurates the tide.

I am anointed by the process of cleaning my body                      and poisoning my mind.

What happens next is anybody's guess, so the radio stays  
tuned to the news. At home, in bed, warm, fighting  
sleep undercover. A cracked window delivers  
slippery cold breath to keep the captain alert.

And moving forward.

## MY BACK IS UP

Against the ocean like my mother  
Told me never to do for fear  
Of the rogue wave that might  
Sneak, awakened from sleep  
By the too-close moon

A wild arm-swinging bee fit  
Inside the Cordovan longship  
With small white mizzen sail, flagging  
Torn by tempest and time

Anchor dredging into sandy  
Rock and pulverized shell  
Spewing forth an expurgation

Sitting in silence and dusk  
Counting the last breaths  
Of my father

## FALSE IMAGE

A young boy fights a loop of cold,  
coiled baling wire with both hands,  
binding four ancient steel wheels.

Black matchstick trusses  
hang silent in the sky – hibernating.  
A rollercoaster against slate October morning.

No coat; canvas  
Vans; short sleeves

A single, dry, and cracked leather glove,  
fished from beneath the seat  
of his father's 1968 Suburban, folded in half  
to protect his hands from cable braids slicing  
harder into his skin with every bouncing step.

Steel thread plaited through a quartet  
entanglement of steel wheels  
yokes the casters encrusted in time  
and rust, then dug out the back of a barn  
and dragged onto an oil-soaked Indian blanket  
on the empty fairground midway.

The boy's feet straddling  
the faint outline of concentration  
camp family barracks overdrawn.  
Sloped shoulders strain upward, level  
with his deer velvet earlobes, under  
the drawn weight of the wheels  
he doesn't want but his father does,  
and the long, grey day stretching ahead of them.

#### AT HOME IN THE CRUCIBLE

Taconite and turquoise newborn dynamited  
desert heat and sand, a gift for a silver oracle.  
He[r] mother, melted to glass by the sound of thunder,  
hands he[r] to the moon cast and bound by three magi.

In black relief, the mother doesn't ask how she can / can [s]he hold two spirits?

Instead, flees, on slick blade rails with family back  
to the Rust Belt, to safety, hiding behind dragon's teeth.

At home in the crucible, air raid sirens wail

while scab children find god living in daily torture

rituals of coal bin beatings and castoff humiliation.

“Let’s see how you tinkle,” said the first invasion,

blind to the air shimmering around a gaping wound.

Darkened cavern foundry, between heavy  
deafening clangs of glowing red cooling steel

extruded in a shower of sparking fireworks,  
mighty gears mesh and scrape stone into fine powder,

anthracite ash trapped in a furnace half a day for coke.  
A magnet plows furrows in rows through crushed rock

dust dragging precious ore from worthless stone  
and Jess sees [her]self for the first time on the street

in a magician’s mirror among Christmas wrapping paper.

## ARTERIAL

Feeble foot-worn trails plunge into blackberry thickets  
Bordered North and South by state streets and BNSF  
Stampede Subdivision tracks. One man in sleeping bag  
Clothing, then a couple, young and wet from building rain,  
Garbage-bagged backpacks draped and disappearing into thorns  
Pumping the circuit between the city and the coal mine.

Cold, putty aluminum chair kisses muraled wall  
Buried beneath Highway 18 overpass, rubber feet  
Touching fine, dry sand like ash, and wasted cigarette  
Butts, filters over F St. SE. Closed-cover, grey vinyl  
Notebook, notes open on lap, fabric-rubber-looking book-  
marked page, my wife’s handwriting, round and slanted,

plays “Vulnerable Adult Protection Order” across the top

Police cruiser, black and white, slows and stops  
on 4th, faced North. Window slides down, a slash  
Of frozen panic, eyes askance. Police GAZE.  
Over open passenger seat, laptop  
bolted to the dash for a long minute.

Still and humid air, pregnant before passing  
Cars, charge oily particle road spray through short  
Tunneled walls and ceiling carpeted in frieze, giant  
Cartoon daughters and neighbor kid pillow fight  
In silhouetted magenta and cantaloupe relief.

Window slides up, car drives away. 4<sup>th</sup> and F  
intersection no-signal-U-turn. Boomerang window  
down, cop driver, “Hey!” Through open window, like,  
me? “Yeah?” “What are you doing?” “Writing,” I say.

Sunglasses parked, “How long,” on his forehead,  
Splitting eyebrows, “you gonna be there?” and sandy  
crew cut. “How long you gonna be there?”

“Two hours,” then nothing. A stare typed  
on his computer. Window up. Drives South. Away.

Earbuds fished from pocket, knotted. Black screen  
blazing under sooty overpass. King Tubby’s channel shuffles,  
volume set to blast to 75, the max allowed by machine.  
First beat and a half of cavernous rimshots gong  
me back. Augustus Pablo reflecting from my phone now,  
questioning, bulging knit tam hides dread power.  
Serious Haile Salassie peers over his shoulder,  
“IF YOU HAVE NOTHING  
TO DO  
PLEASE DON’T DO IT HERE!”

Catch and release phone inside coat – inside pocket –  
ebullient rubber wires tether mind to heart.

Sleeping bag man materializes from the bushes between walks  
Toward, stops facing South “You a writer?”

“Notes for a poem.”

“Huh,” leaves South, to my left.

He runs to walk with the young wet couple I didn’t see reappear.

## CELESTIAL FLUX

gritty whispered curses turn to diamond  
timid dawn domes weak over horizon  
night like a hand driving face  
into rough brick wall

cataract eye jammed to brass sees for the first time  
channels scored in rust stone soil of Mars, rivers  
strumming over ruined marble edge

the moon fixed pale in place, fleet as condor  
wings in hissing headwind pressed sleek  
lids shut against numberless  
biting grains sandblasted  
on zephyr current

but here were constellations, in lavender pinhole sky,  
cursed with endless patience, swallowing whole  
the notion that any one thing is  
or is not.

## CHOSEN

Perse Aster petals, sprayed like fireworks,  
girdle golden disc and Goldenrod cones,

soft as a gecko's tongue licking eye,  
drooped under a suite of honeybees, gifts

of brittle paper Pansies and imperious  
orange Gladiolas bound in yesterday,

alone in the center of the room.

Trumpeting Forsythia, brassy, twigged, and limp,  
announce swarming Impatiens like grandmother's

evening gown. Candy-sweet, peach Nasturtiums  
at sunrise set, swell, and wither in cardinal

balsamic tang as Irises, saturated  
in grapevine light, lord softly over

an icy drift of sage sweeping air.

In November Elmwood shelter, bird's nest  
weed – Queen Anne's Lace – and Elderberries slip

and sway through holes in lost rings, and Sunflower  
frees itself through cracked sidewalk...

## PASSING

/ out of the garage / enter men's turf / a guy at work / outside  
my window at dawn / leafed through / a straight razor /

/ hands on my skin / in my body / reached  
for a cigarette / he beckoned / across town /

/ take a long shower / look a second time /  
/ he covered me / over

winter / see muscles in thighs and arms / bay rum  
on his palms / snug around my neck /

/ body lean and hard / sixteen hundred dollars / glanced  
in the mirror / a clean line / a copy of popular mechanics /

/ T-shirt and BVDs / perfect DAs - one inch all over – / roughed  
my cheeks / smoothed back my hair / quart of oil / shook  
powder / old triumph motorcycle during the winter /

/ barbershop / barber snapped a huge red cloth in the air /  
/ air sweet / sit in the chair / clumps of hair fell / electric

razor buzzed across the top / barber smiled / back to front  
/ pursed his lips / brushed them off /

/ hips melted away / in front of the mirror /  
/ flat top / soft hairs of a brush /  
/ myself in the mirror / at home /

## TODAY IS A GOOD DAY TO DIE

Stitching a hem back and forth on grey dry  
asphalt, and hard tar chipseal, past pig iron

fire escape. Cold syrup sun slung low on horizon.  
Jaws wired shut. Snowbank thinned at first faint green

edge of Spring. Brittle Triumph tires warm  
in wan sun. Black painted ceiling pricked

with stars. Leaning in to feel the sewing  
machine harmony of twisted black rubber

grip on slick chrome. Biceps like stones under  
Rocco's heavy horsehide eye gleaming

with zippers. Two hundred miles out and back  
the first day, like a memory slipping

in the wind through close cropped hair.

No choices to make except when to turn around.

No hearts break except this one, my own.

#### RENEWAL CEREMONY

She slashed her hands twice,  
staccato through the air before they smacked  
to rest above her eyes her fingertips  
complete a circuit across a double salute  
of arresting, white knuckles  
in the middle of her brow.

Grown children, dressed in kidnapped hibiscus  
and palm leaf beachwear, wait, polyester,  
for pale smiles to curl the corners  
of the afternoon, the babies in their arms,  
like echoes, reverberate. Rustling carbon copies  
of carbon copies that never look identical,  
but nevertheless, leave the same stain.

A slow count of three, hissed  
behind clenched teeth, slips past  
her lips to hover for a second  
in the scattered light of the community  
center common room, and no one speaks.

Her hands still pressed to her head

like blinders, slacken as the group suffocates.  
Her grimace fades into a wan smile  
as she grinds her conviction to ash. Relax.

The photographer, once she is calm,  
asks if we are prepared, and counts  
to three, and no one speaks,  
but a trio of vicious strobes crash  
into that moment, etching a border in time.

## PUGET SOUNDS

Ablution requires the removal of at least sixteen major mountain highways. But the wrathful nature of flyaway adventure enterprise puts the western peace plan in peril. And the pressure to prepare the garden gets stronger as the days grow long. Boulders bounce wildly around as they carom down pristine mountainside, taking out anything in their path. Early warning systems put in place by your grandparents, sharing their caution, signal disaster as their rusty insides spring into action after fifty years of non-use. Holiday merrymakers vacate like a housefire before the inevitable crush of primordial wilderness wipes out everything built for their pleasure: precious treasures wrapped in synthetic down and blue, plastic tarp moments stolen from nature with multi-functional phones. Homes away from home splatter, flattened on wild amber, littoral plains. The profane nature of wilderness construction looks like nothing having noted the raw power of time.

Warm orange, golden white light...

## HOME

A bend in a road near the river,  
Riverside Dr. plantation revival white columns split  
entry – closed and locked – oak front door  
aluminum screen spring intact stretched beyond usefulness  
New gun found, stashed

in the glove box. A carpool  
eye poked into booming black  
barrel, slide drawn back  
Evergreen tree easily twice as high as  
the house centers the yard, rifles  
above the roofs of one-story apartments behind,  
low duplexes. Three cars bumper to bumper  
three cars in the driveway spanning street  
to overfull, attached garage  
In back, under wood and steel  
sundeck, sister, 9 and I, 11, white and shaking,  
forgotten chicken eggs rot and split and Sulphur weep  
A bullet cracks Chevrolet firewall  
and front passenger-side tire hiss  
Burst shells on and around stacks of crumbling  
firewood, rotten tires, neglected, rusty machine  
parts packed with cobwebs  
Inside the punched out aluminum screen,  
long, claw scratches yaw in hollow wooden door  
hiding furnace, freezer, pantry, family room  
Up the stairs a shot dog, tongue lolled to one side,  
lying still on gold shag carpet, not yet  
rigid, soft to the touch, bloodless

## LONELINESS TRAINING

*Someday you will have to do this on your own,*  
the old woman said, standing up to a chorus of stuck,  
cracking joints that sing the anthem of self-reliance,  
their tribute to decades of service.  
Every interaction, a lesson meant to teach  
solutions to the questions that fill the mundane,  
asking of themselves, nothing.

*Get your coat. Let's go.*

The door swings open and closed again as the pair enter the void.  
The old woman severs the tether that binds them  
with a hand unseen by the pupil,  
sealing it off from the profanity of the wilderness  
in a dance that simultaneously reveals  
the wondrousness of creation  
and locks away the holy shrine, wet and dripping, behind them.

*Slow down.*

Down the steps, out of the gate, into the street.  
The cars around them undeterred.

Their space, the river in which they spawn,  
protected from harm by indivisible contracts  
drawn before time began by alchemists  
consumed by carving fortune out of chaos.

*You walk on the other side.*

The rules, they come without explanation.

## LAST PHILIPPIANS

Rheumy eyes, clouded  
by age and experience Broken blood  
vessels mark the passage of time on  
tissue thin skin Hanging  
loose over the right amount of bones

and money to keep them moving  
into the next century Forever Soft teeth,  
soft hands, hollowed out, empty  
crucible Every lick of flame grows weak  
through the spyglass of hindsight, The Idle Wealth of the twentieth century outfoxes the kids  
again On the hunt for new territory to stake claims. Space.

The cured and dried – pickled – severed left  
hand of a twice-hanged man still  
grants the wishes of children and grandmothers.