

Deerhead Puppets in the Forest

by Jamie Grefe

A spark is a gouged word: stewed to annihilate, scrambled, botched in a pot to dry. Lead us to the quiver, let us tremble. Noon, we paw nails under rugs, run fingertips over books, rip cupboards from hinges and spiral open the machine, for the creature is near the roof or not so nearly obscured by the tongue, but near enough that it should be kept to a quiet surround. Hide the child. I tie knots to kites, letters unsent, broken on strange claws. Plumb the root, son. Night streak. Here she is, my bare mark. X comes to me robed. Night falls when one foot is planted in front of the other on our morning path through the core to the rubble, the core smoke, the core concrete slabs assembled, the core rubble lit as in swirls of core haze or sheets of fog and in the midst, a dim cloud: she'll swirl thinning in more words of rubble. A disappearing act, this pile. I'll be the receiver. Blank nights away from the camp. The moth herd where we kiss the tongue. A stuck horse and rows of meat. Through the yard to the heap. Dig the hole to sleep in our grave. I place my hand in soil. The soil is moist. There is a form in the mush, a phantom-me in a hovel. Outside the hovel, a gash of brick and wood. It is I with lost child and wife toward town in the muck. We sleep in slop pools, the oil field of our dreams smell tar, drown in dew. We are close to the damp man at dusk with his two dogs belly-up on the grass licking grass, near the spot where we live hand to mouth or wet in the pond, wetter and light, wetter and drier, drying with muck stuck to our skin in splotches or waves of smoke to weave dirt into honey rooms for the children to play. How they crash night, on storm days, on windowless days. Crash the shining mist. They break, dampen the house to bits. Our house is full of meaning. It is not a theory, nor should it be tender. Shanks are not tender. This is a form

of love and of that I am certain. A smell comes to me out of the spread lips. A smell comes to rot. The smell of light is an angel, a swan made of smoke. She goes forth, tracing the way back to her lost home. She's smothered in dust. The heart tells the wind to burn reams. Watch the horses eat. It trickles from nostrils in waves like words unspoken. The day burns smoke. The woods are made of smoke. Out of the grey beyond. A gasp is a falling axe falling to the split stump in slow fluttering motion to split unused words and how we split the stump with the raised axe, and with each arch, each chop the discarded roles of past stories I have been known to thunder, weave rain, hallowed ground or hollow holes become mouths. For we are woven. Could this somehow be back in the bed where the little one slept panting and dreamt tossing, where she once slept in this part of the hovel, where she once slept ticklish dreams or holy cabin revelry or tiles all patter, soft in delirious folds? The creature is entangled in the middle with the words of where she wants to be just a pouring an outpouring a sprouting from the mouth open and caked and each split tooth is a leak of things she says she wants to do or places to be in the long range long haul flow ranging and sour flow of time and effort, redoubled, quadrupled in bunches of lopped off tongues or made real to speak, made to seem real to seem too real but not real but real in the glimmering flow of time and effort, effort and receptivity. Clink glasses. To drip: it takes you there even without you having to be there or go there in order to be there, but you were there before the flood, before the tremors, before the fits. And he's bitter now, all buttered in grease. He's used up the pathways outside the city, slumped in the mud by the gate. There are fevers at stake, glistenings of neon and dogs that scoff, dogs to lick the blood of all these dissected limbs of truth. Damp, we stumble. Draped in robes of teeth, we crawl. Gripping rods, stripping robes, run the plank. The sea awaits. Mist is sliced, a dinner platter tipped, splattered in drips to hard shatter the glass wall in a huff of ambiguity, loose thought, a tightly constructed attempt where we pitch temporary answers like a pinch of brown sauce drizzled. It is more than sex. He's bearded, that man. Coated,

it would seem. The voice, I have heard, a trepidation of tone, a default mumble by necessity. Formulation of the question in which the purpose arises or is overshadowed by the oncoming tubes in shades, the imminent dusk and the storm it shall bring, by failure interpreted or misinterpreted as something other than it is, something that it ought to be for the sake of rebuilding a life in shambles. Mist is splattered. We see through smoke to the man behind the mind or the mind that is the man in the damp coat. His gloves are black, made of leather. Glory is a drizzle, a rain or a light. Now slumped against the mosaic window, the kitchen door slams shut in a huff of winter steam, anger embodied in a sling or a punch. Fisted, this slouch sunken to dry. Her chest heaves in a gasping body. Fisted. Breath is a pressure, stuck in a confusion of data, hegemony by numbers. A constricted tongue, hubris laden. A rasp of ecstatic sound. Fisted. We say breathe from the pelvis, breathe from the belly, breathe from the chest, expand the chest to breathe mist, flatten the chest slow and inhale more air in order to breathe words. Suck lungs through shanks. The legs twitch open. A rasp of doom forms red, the lips speak. Spread open. We are after therapeutics not medications or musings, although we won't rule those methods out or throw them to the heap as a corpse to trample for their potential benefit brims with useable sticks, splinters to pummel minds open in pinks and blues. We, too, claim that healing varies with the treatment. [What purpose was there in the fluttered defeat of what happened on the bed made of crumpled raindrops? What purpose, the twitching pelvis or the forced gag?] The doorbell is an explosion of chops from the blade in the door. When the winding rubble smashes into the damp man, I am thrown. Awake on back to the grey, to the sheet of rain lengthwise: still, unmoving, moving ground. It arrives covered in dirt. The sheet of rain is heavy against my cheeks. Shut eyes, save eyes from the rubble. He is moving now, moving out from the winding rubble and through the sheet of rain a leathered hand, a saving hand, the saving hand of the damp man, that hand reaches out and slaps clean the scowl from my bloodied face. The slap loosens my tongue. These utterances are opened in

the rain and his face, a blur, a smiling blur. And, we speak, we run away to the field. We breathe no more and twitch more to breathe fused air. Womb breath still wavers inside you. A fluttering inside you, an army of centipedes. But the twisting perversity in how they merge is a creative act thrust to the hands of the unpredictable others, controllable to a point and smothered uncontrollable simultaneously, lying and puking guts in the street, speaking worlds to life, worlds unbound, silencing thought to death, breeding people to crawl, pulling tubes to keep her alive a little too long on the stained sheets of our misery. She lives in the deleted now, which means walks to the salon or to the canteen prison past the camp fence. The bench where she is strapped and seated lies broken in charred pages, the park flooded by too many tongues touching. It is a fever where we beat ourselves crazy with verbal shards, thoughts shredded, lips recomposed in the remembering of days sleeping in boats on the lake. I'm slumped in answers again, passed out on the rim, fetal on the bed, unready to begin the dissection. Assemble the shards to make a stone near her canal. It's a blossoming thought, but a thought I choose to hide in a line of thought better left unmade. You write in red marks about horror shows. They lead you, my thought undead or hounded by tunnels, whoever you are to wherever you must go to breathe, then on your way to the station down the hill. They lead you onward in splattered images stuck lingering and interpretations unhinged like an axe. They lead you through the muddle of how things turn out or could falter in the comedown, are thought about in the turning toward of their inevitable turning out. Ever thinking, too late. Lights are off, night on the wounded hill, on the hill night is everlasting, quiet words put to myself, this, some shivering self in question, one of these selves in croaks and gurgles to hold this other, more stable, yet solitary self up to the light of its prismatic roles in life. Hear the signal drone become a static blur. That means he's arrived without a compass. We have defined each other in terms of who we think we are and who we think we should be for each other in this particular moment of our once-occurring talk together on the night of the grill, by the

screams, near the turtles, by the Chinese smeared in rubble at the tables, by the Frenchman and the Englishman. And, we come to the first night in a pleated skirt, white shirt, stockinged to the shins. She's a damn cackle, those bare thighs, you said to the wind. They laughed at the family in the belly, how we choose to rejoice in this burnt yard, words vanished, fillets: phenomenology and stained hands or Filipino love while eating shreds of sheep on sticks of wood. It is a slice of penguin fur on a soiled bed, frozen for hot loins. Those are the sheets made of hair. It is a wet mush, a mouth to eat the soup around thighs. It's a zebra photograph, that place where we squat. With stockings and slow unbuttoning in the hole near the squat room, we are told she will come quick. We come slow and long where she squats, come quick on the stockings. I've taken her skirt, buried it in dirt. The rubble crumbles. The damp man is clenched tight against a slab of cement. He is emptied of purpose, all memories and I am there, robed in granite. I see head tilt, just tilt, taste the smoking pile, the pile falling from a higher place, a hole below the sky, a circular window, the warbling roof, a passing plane, a cloud itself, it is hard to tell and impossible to say when one's head is rained on by glass and brick. She's leaking. The rain is a sleeping pill serenade. The mist stinks like rain. The battering is a sign to leave. The rain is a sign to chase the girls back down the bricked path (past the squat room, past the come, past the stains), scrape bricks on either side and I pass and rejoin the one I love so we may prevent our creature from further licking up her own bile, while we sit in the dark. The bile, I think, her little brick road of happiness. I swallow muck. The long and the short of it, two ends of a vine. A stroll in the park outside the grounds of the complex. A science of tears is revealed in the shrine of mud. A poetry of bones awash in the pond. The winds speak in gurgling gusts. The vines are words, speaking drifts to the wind. She's there with the mother whose spine is being adjusted. By hands on fire. They're making food, using tubes to feed whales small doses of the bones of doctor hands. A nap in the heat. A book of hate, pages blowing in the acidic sun, unread or unreadable in the moan. We shrug. The sky is one long cloud. The

whole sky is smoke. Hours elapse in the thrall of a multitude of bodies, openly revealed. There are seven hundred of us watching. She's all fingers. I'm denied. A body rolls over to left side. Arch leg to crack bone or pinpricks in the shoulder. A stream of milk. The blanket pulled up tight to chin is a reveal. I pull a telling thought and no one is watching but myself touching this other sleeping body. The click. A change of dress is in order. Wiggle fingers. Mop floor. Scrub sinks with brine. Wipe dust. Sweep hair into a pile. Sip oil. One stroke at a time. One stroke to tighten control over the rigors of empty mouths. You are fragile in the sea. Watch the shore for motion. She breathes seaweed. Watch the sand convulse. More blood flows in the stream, in the river there is too much mud. We are after algorithms of vacuity and strong doses of purpose. It is our drug. We test purpose. For the sake of personal and social order and all the possibilities it contains as explainable. We are caught. There is no way to reach the horizon unless you are a ghost. [Does the spinal cord ache like an egg sac in restraint or a tub of tears filled with raindrops from the barn?] Rub under ears, feel heat. [Does the blood trickles from the wound at the base of her spine? Does it drip?] She's on the sofa again in a heap of nude, covered in rubble, rank with afterbirth, bubbling words like purpose or flower or spring or memory. Bruised in the passing. Screaming from the basement. The locked chest. There is a person pissing inside the body. It is a boy or a girl or a wave or a world in song, coo truths to lie. It spins and flaps of a fairy or a slug, a song, a snippet of a record, an imitation, a question, a judgement, a feeling, a stretch, a crackle, a flit, an outburst, a sigh, a laugh, a tear, a gyration, a pique, an outpouring, a restrained reply, an imagined scenario, a dream, a fit split wide, a listening, a thought to the surface, a stroke, a thought repressed, a kick or a paw, a sketch, a slide, a fumble, a drudge, a limp aging, a sitting, a greeting, a farewell, or a rumble in the chamber. For the moment arrives when the world, too much to grasp, too slippery, too much a consequence of not being able to author or alter the storyline, explodes in a fever of distraction or deadly habit. We go off track. I put bullets in your shin. You climbed

the hill to the cracked spine. How he hurt you and will never pay. How he lies to skim tears or suck life from her lies. How he flies into mountains. Let us bury him in the river, pockets weighed in the bills of the mother. We skirt the path, cross the field. Wild alders confuse the mind to leap at frog shadows. Deerhead puppets in the forest shimmer. The river ebbs, each frothy pattern, a thought denied. I gulp gallons of words, drunk on the love of sound. There, the sparkle of an accomplishment is revealed in the belch, crawls from the bile. I wait by the wounded sunset. I have walked to the edge where it disappears into a hollow of dust. It is there I brood having lost my self to the weather. This one is a metallic clink on the rim of where I want to end up, teetering on the brink of a bell, the dribble, circling the drain to chant: the goat, the shaven, the yellowing teeth. The day is yet to begin, yet has begun or so it seems. A growl. I whip you with a stick. The thought invades, becomes mind fodder to strike shanks, festers around the fundament, ruins words, tints the bruised eyes, taints the loins in wax, saps life, and assaults with the intent to prolong the blur as long as you shall let it run its course to the end. In the end, there is a moan. A calf in all blood. Hear fawns cry for damp father. Heart tick, sheets bleed gouts of blood. [Why hasn't the rubble been cleared from the pile behind the old barn?] Not the bales, bales twined with straw and yellowish, a sea in the fields near the battered building once called home. There is a tractor coming toward the limping body. It moves with smoke and decapitated seagulls on strings could hoist the body up, harvest the tongue to speak only in truths. Only grunts reveal the truth. How dreary one would become with all those strings. I strike the table. It is always consequential, this thinking, utterly emptied of itself, reducing me to a heap, the way the creature comes crawling, ever slowly in meticulous grasps in strings, in grins around corners, out of the hingeless cupboard, a question mark shaped like a tendon, shaped like a wet hook or a chateau window washed up on the shore in a smear of rubble. Watch it slither across the floor. Little hops to the mountain cabin. The cabin is an alpine lodge. Follow the trail. It wants nothing more than to gut me where I sleep me to a life of

haunted sex dreams. He says he wants to eat her in the manifestation. Raise the chalice. Someone says this feasting mind is irrelevant to such urges, but not to a hunger pang or a severed trunk on the dining room table. A fistful of shark lungs or clinical philosophy would suit you just fine as opposed to whatever is merely on the menu as an appetizer (fin, husk, trunk, toes). It is on my lap, in the palm of my terror. It is in hands gripping, ripping, yipping piano chords, and lipping secret liturgies into my ear. I have forced the purpose to a line extending out of the mind and I hold it there in front of my face, a force of the autumnal wind. She beats me on the bed. I can see it, though it is not yet formed. I'll hold to it. We enjoy this stretch of limitations, listening to the pigs grunt. Maybe it is nothing, maybe cruel, come to murder. Sometimes, one can almost see it as if it actually exists. I've captured the screams. To only step in would be the start of a life. Toe the hole from the edge to the center, where the crust is thinner. A bell. I have been a slave of that lawn once, but this, this is a different lawn, not the same, but it feels the same, always smells the same as I imagine it would smell were I to be there now as if I have been there before, but know I haven't. It creaks. More holes in which to burrow a finger or three to inspect. More than one bell. Spank the maiden to growl. The beast belches in the moat. Down a lubricated throat. In the belly. Lopped off hundreds of legs. Chewed through entrails to the core. Taken societal guts and weaved them through nostrils to noses, through the self, through slime, called it "study." Switch the egg to power, pound back and ease, honk horns in rain, on streets with sine waves, how they sing: The blood! The slop! The blood! The words. Keep quieter for the stillness is in the unvoiced response. She longs to return to the moat, but is too damp to know. We burn smoke for what he left behind. We turn beads for what he left behind. But you, you are serpentine skin to the hilt. The honk is not a bell, but a howl or a poem. One day, we bury ourselves outside the city wall. We stand on the moon and lick dirt from the sky-shaped tongue, the leaden sky, silent at dusk, smeared in shreds of stone. It is dirt not yet settled in the rubble. And, smear gel on limbs, call chant to

speak. They stand around you in a circle, naked, stiffened or moist, eggs held in a sac, in bags of thread. They are waiting for you to begin. Your thoughts are perverse, she bays, dabs, sobs, but she is no longer the she I once knew her to be. My purpose is no longer mine alone, no, no longer my own to hold here in the middle of all these piles of eyes in the moat of what once used to be our buildings, but now look like fiery towers or the shadows of shattered frames. I gulp her juice. The joy. I have cast it to certain others for ratification. She's humming. To the emptiness echoed, returning. We have pigs for the purpose of sleep. I birth it. I have bitten through the skin to the chewy bone and sucked my own bones dry for lack of heat in the sour winter when my skin leaks red dots in order to learn more about the meaning of pain and disgust. We study vulgarity for fun, lap bile from pillows. Save some water, save some coffee or water for me to inject, smoke in the thirst of my elder. Some have prepared everything in advance, but I am limp. This questioning session has not yet come to an end in spite of her bright smile, her fervor for life. I call her felicity. She wants me to learn. I will learn to grunt. I will learn what I think I should learn in light of those among us or those departed who devoted themselves to a purification of the mind. I will learn to whip, to receive the blows. I will learn to interrogate myself. I will learn to become my own torturer or police officer or surgeon and learn to tell if what I am saying is the right kind of lie. I will learn to demand more of myself than they do, than I do, than she does. I will learn to slap sense or insanity out of my corrupted self. I will learn to reinterpret disgust. I will learn to tell as I wish to tell in the name of beauty or performance. I will learn to suffer perversity for the sake of greatness. I will learn what it is like when sunk, pushed down, face first in the bog of mutable memory, how things shift to the putrid, the mouth open to suck more shit from your twisted intentions, how they haunt worry to a state of deification and soft hair. I will learn to talk in ways that are beautiful to myself and to all those who know me. I will learn to strum and to wither. How miserable you are in all your spilled words. I've kept her for you. I've kept him for you. Keep the sad creature struggling,

swelling larger and suckling harder, well-fed or shove it in the muck to the topsoil fingertips and lop them off with a holy sickle or a sharpened fingernail and wash, child of the moat, wash those hands clean, for they are damp with the mist. Drink, I say, drink her milk hot or suck life dry to make it reek like puddles of light or plops of dreams and visions to float your tongues to serenity. You can watch them crumble in the pit. We'll all be denied in the end. Better when her assessment is ripe with stench, not only critical. Ring the bell: a growl, smarter in revealed content or more fleshed to the truth than this one here, the speaking one or the one of the fingers to keys, palm to pen, fist to face, until drooping flesh melts to puddles in the chamber. And, the way reveals itself: a maze like how fabric clings to the night body yet blows, no, billows by the breeze as you stand and whip fingers, walk forward and halt, pause and wait, scars extended for a ride to what is left of the rest of them, the forgotten town or the alpine lodge. Be there, for there lies the semblance of who you were. I'll meet you when the flesh returns to smoke. In the sedan on the way to an airport or an abandoned building, the sinking incident happens up from schisms in the gravel. Legs quiver, feel limp in the aftermath of the drunken walk through hedges of fire, lawns drowned dry, stunk artifice of pain. Stumble straight ahead. I'm breathing, right breathing, not grunting. His voice is a low whisper, a tenor blast. There is always constraint in the ability to choose. Use strings to stretch. Our lives are lived out in these constraints. The brakes fail. The house sags in the moat. A slice of violence or babbled rubble. Misspoken, again. The strands of the larger web of power plays and rebounds. A slap across the side of a face can be a kiss or a whip. Your face driven into mud. We are unspeakable. [Where are all the zebras or the horses or the meat slices laid bare on the granite?] I want substantial regrets, dear, or ancient chants. On your chest in the dirt with the dogs. The pigs arrived. The man who bent her over the bushes, locked her in the bathroom of the lodge. The woman who sucked life from the limp man on the old bus. All, damp in the mire. The son strangled in mire, faceless and splendid. The mother passed out in the ditch, lifeless. In the field. A

brick. Back shot. Misery in the rubble or barking smoke. I'm the bearded haggler. Delightful words or cadences like pincers. The gait on the roof of the other man with the dangling arms, broken bridges. I've breached the woods to the dogs, fought off the bells and cleared the tunnel. I've forgotten the coat in the lodge. The creature says, we perish. We are in the realm of seeking squalor. Nails scrape belly, poke holes in skin to inhale dust. Shirtless now. Bottleneck in the field of smoke. Gone beyond. Jagged glass shards rubbed smooth. I've weighed the stones to determine their weight without, left without the proper use of a scale and I bear them both together in one stitched palm as a gift to unravel. They all grunt. We both move onward with stones in our pockets. I hold the stone, my damp mind, to the ground or the trunk of a tree named shivering luck. I had a branch, but the branch transfigured into a brain. I let it be and look what happened to all these strings. They turned into bells, into dream-twitches. The rancid have been burned or rerouted, mangled into streams of vinegar. Smoke signals are black ink at night for our children. We salvage the parts to build a house out of the rubble of so many pig corpses. There was once a lawn and a moat, but it has turned to tire-smoke and oil. It left me for the hole under the washing machine. Little legs flop on the table. And I pace without moving, a gurgling creature in heat, too full to breathe. I'll hold you down. And I move still to the bedroom to pry open the window, avoid the honk. But, the window, opened for days or years or nights or never, how many nights I now cannot keep track of, has been cracked or splintered by time's grin or those gangly caws, how they itch the veins. I think of you, am not sure for the crack has splintered into a swirl. I'm left emptied, you glutton. To die blank or expressionless or a contortion, the way the womb is pulled tight against the strap or a tumble and how her face lit up with joy from the stir within, the tendon writhing outward. I drank air like whiskey. It kicked from the inside like a whale stuffing its own blowhole back inside itself, that hairless birth of my second pig. The worms are made of bones. The pigs are made of worms. I see the bowl full of worms. I take skin. I set the bowl down, but before I do,

I watch the dangling man prance. He's grunting. What a stench. Like vinegar. Like butter. He disappeared on cracked mud-groans. I resume to mind the room. The room chants. She's emptier, blushed, forgotten now in the musk outside the moat. The curious heatwave. The dip or grope. A tint. Her lips quiver. We slingshot questions about failure, bloated dreams collapsing. I'm smothered in questions. To the dogs, we snort. Our orders are misinterpreted. They fetch. My life is one gigantic fault, a heaping pile of rubble. And of all the rest, we suffer complicit. Unto demolished cabins, they roll their machines to the lodge. And calls the desert calls. And calls the city calls. And calls the forest calls. And calls suburbia calls to the mountain temple calls. I've bent to smells of muck. Over a wire calls. We are dissolving in liquid, addicted to drinking words as if consequences no longer mattered. These thoughts are a tangle of winter smoke. I'd kill to revel in the blossoming uncertainty of an untouched mind. He crossed the chasm, the moat, unharmed, laughing or weeping. He was who he was, damp and unharmed. You slipped, the slope a bleat until the stream where you stretched face first in the cool rush sucked you under. That was you in the eaves. It was winter again and the evening hubris was hot with love on the steam. We will cling to our dirt as long as it is necessary for us to do so. There is a scene, a tree, or a muck-pond in which I swim, struggle to you, but it is too deep and I cannot swim to the door, must struggle, but the muck, the steaming muck and it is all too much muck, tightens lungs, sucks words to silence. The pond is a tree, too. The moat is a struggle. It was there, after the jaunt, you saw the tops of the other trees and how they were one mass like flesh in the river. There was a barn. And now, in this tree, so ruined, we are all at a distance from the piles of metal, piles of seared lips. Those close to you, how they make you who you are and how their words turn against you. We make it to the horizon as the dogs leap over the edge of a nearby cliff as if they are diving into eternity or sailing into the deepest sleep. Others grunt strings to bind. Others always have an angle in the slop. There must be others, even in the protection of your solitude. Pull the shoulders tight and release the

stench. Stretch the arms outward, past the shoulders and reach forward. Drop the arms slowly: knuckles to ankles bound. But, we tread oil, kick water. The moat. Kick. Keep kicking. The dark looms, wrapped in soiled rags. My belly is still swelling with the sweat of all those dead flies on the tongue, roses on the cow quilt, blanket to your scarred back. The urine stained picture is a sermon. The shit stains of the mind unhinged. Plastic drips from ear holes and holes to crawl sounds back into like a human hive. I'm floating under. But, to skirt the path, over the ridge, past the trees, beyond the moat, to the end where the field stretches to the sun and to think to oneself about the many roles playing out and to lose oneself in a grunt, to make the role a better role for self and others, too. It is there, in the field, where the river touches mist and where sun shines on the buildings of the city with towers, ancient rumblings and commercial spending, with automobiles rusted, streets of brick and fog, and wards for the sick. I am on a bus in the city. I am scalpels. There is a room where I stand and talk to others about bells they have not read. Yet, I have become distracted here by the smoke, standing straight, stiff to the sun. The pain stands sharp this time. This decrepit body once again. A bell. A funeral. Now, the temple. Finding myself caught up in the distraction. She's left me. The fires are quenched, drained slop: I come to believe in the power of formulating the most efficacious questions. I do not believe I have exhausted the explosive possibilities for the kinds of questions that could have been asked. I have given you the provisional results.

