Thievery

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for my parents
CONTENTS

I
Slowdown 3
Gunbroke 4
Some Drowned Archer 5
The Country West 6
All You Ploughboys 8
The Woods in Concord 10
Naughty Boys Well and Truly Punished 12
Hometown Courage 14
A Costume for Crossing the Rainbow Bridge 16
Things Unso 18
The Push 19

II
Paracosmics 23
Pubescence 25
The Better Kids 26
First Responder 27
Love Song for Another Boy 29
The Marchers 30
Good Form 31
Trisomic Dialogue 33
Thievery 35
Only 37
Bronx Flyweight Spars 38
The Fire Door 39
III

Chronophrenia 43

IV

No One Is Keeping You Here 59
Dust Bowl 61
First Sermon 62
Red Shirts and No Boots 63
Hy-Vee 64
The Dock Lights at Cattlepurse in the Fall 65
South 67
Wrecker 68
Ekphrasis 70
Transit 71
A God for October 72
Hello the House 73
Samson at the Pillar 74
Poem for Battered Man 76

Acknowledgments 79
SLOWDOWN

What you cannot face
you face—that’s your direction. In houses in cars
in cars that become houses
the event stage is dark
then revealed, the longest story chapter by chapter,
what makes someone somewhere
despise you. How will I know when it happens?
   It’ll be a long drive,
you’ll know.
Across the street is a street fight
in which a man without shoes shrieks to no one
particularly

but not to me. The alarm clock is pushed away
from the bed and a man is lifted up to a white van.
   His arm falls to signal everyone back
to the races. Or it’s midnight,
   and men and women are in each other
in buildings,
   and some have never gone anywhere
but there, over and over. What apartment are you in
   they will be particularly asked
and they will say
the same as before, Mother. What state are you in?
Again. The question has their scent and the answer
their form. It is the fight of their
lives, if they walk away from it. And then that’s that,
or nearly.
GUNBROKE

South is adventure, north cold but also shelter, and in the west an end. It is south then north then west, the trail. East is finished. To tell it right it must be half in green ignorance and half beneath the groan of a wheel still turning and stained by smoke. The tone of it is that everyone’s been turned out from somewhere by someone, and afterward crossed a place they ran wire across and a place they built a rotwood storm-closet, and pounding atop where a mass grave was made too small and then on to a place nothing startles the horses. You can put a pistol to one and leave it shrugging in a stand of alfalfa and not one other moves near or away. And then south of course are long plains of plain men and plain women all hatless and gunbroke. Blood livens them to themselves, their own hard lips, their own cold singing. They build a city to hold it, and somehow that lasts.