

from *MENTAL HOSPITAL*

Today, mental hospital, I wake
up in your belly and my own is
feeling fallow, falters. I am a
racehorse hung up at the gate:
grist for the glue mill. Chop off
my hooves and call me Alpo, I
am hungry. I am wasted.
Wasting.

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The question of will you or
won't you is a painful one,
indeed. Will you? Won't you?
Choose, with the most delicate
care, your instrument. Run it
through your topmost layers of
skin. Within your heart lies a
gargling teapot. Trickle
yourself into streaming
discontentedness. You absent-
minded little wandering slip of
pale face and glazed eyes, in
time before the stain you were
a flash of spastic joy. Can you
wash that hurt away? Can you
wash it away?

*

Palimpsest arm-flesh, scar
upon scar. To read this skin
codex of my past, you must
decode it pain by bit. Even
cutting yourself necessitates
ritual—rectangular razor
versus the trapezoid, where
you first press the blade. It's all
about what makes you feel
buttery, makes you feel better,
what will sweeten your bitter.

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The doctor sorts my dysfunctions out along pre-arranged axes. Major depressive, PTSD, chemical dependency, no major medical. Axis I, II, III, IV. I needn't be other than the confluence of multiple illnesses. Define me till I cannot define myself. Put mental illness into me. Make me what I can't unbecome.

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Sunday, I sit in the day hall and I cannot write a word. The dusty spots in the grass. The safety glass and dull tile. My dry mouth, a pile of tinder. Rancor, belly growl, I pick at a scab. Liable to crack: a champagne flute, and skinny, and I sing if you touch me right.

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I write *Incalculable* and then I sit, stare off into nothing in particular. I might look deep look lost in thought but I am lost in no thought, in no place, white at my thumbnail's base grows into a halo, blots out thought, out blue of sky through unbreakable window I cannot wake up tomorrow begging my heart, like a bone, to break.

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What a rough day it was—for all of us—to realize our fathers were human, too. The common denominators in a statistically significant majority: conservative religion? Check. Hatred of one or both parents? Check.

There are scars upon scars that you would not think survivable: an extra smile circumnavigates a throat, a forehead's capital X where the bullet stopped short of scrambling the brain, and wrist after wrist of gashes, nicks. The pills can glue you back, but what part glued to which? Forcing in a puzzle piece. The order is the issue.

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Schizophrenics turn into housecats at the full moon. Parts of a wave, talking about a wave. Its base is the depth where there is no more movement. When I find that stillness I, too, am engulfed. Wearing notches into me: wash in, wash out. Wash in, wash out. Wash in, wash in, wash out.