

A MARIAN WOOD BOOK

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CORNELIUS EADY

BRUTAL IMAGINATION

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*The speaker is the young black man
Susan Smith claimed
kidnapped her children.*

HOW I GOT BORN

Though it's common belief
That Susan Smith willed me alive
At the moment
Her babies sank into the lake

When called, I come.
My job is to get things done.
I am piecemeal.
I make my living by taking things.

So now a mother needs me clothed
In hand-me-downs
And a knit cap.

Whatever.
We arrive, bereaved
On a stranger's step.
Baby, they weep,
Poor child.

MY HEART

Susan Smith has invented me because
Nobody else in town will do what
She needs me to do.
I mean: jump in an idling car
And drive off with two sad and
Frightened kids in the back.
Like a bad lover, she has given me a poisoned heart.
It pounds both our ribs, black, angry, nothing but business.
Since her fear is my blood
And her need part mythical,
Everything she says about me is true.

WHO AM I?

Who are you, mister?
One of the boys asks
From the eternal backseat
And here is the one good thing:
If I am alive, then so, briefly, are they,
Two boys returned, three and one,
Quiet and scared, bunched together
Breathing like small beasts.
They can't place me, yet there's
Something familiar.
Though my skin and sex are different, maybe
It's the way I drive
Or occasionally glance back
With concern,
Maybe it's the mixed blessing
Someone, perhaps circumstance,
Has given us,
The secret thrill of hiding,
Childish, in plain sight,
Seen, but not seen,
As if suddenly given the power
To move through walls,
To know every secret without permission.
We roll sleepless through the dark streets, but inside
The cab is lit with brutal imagination.

SIGHTINGS

A few nights ago

A man swears he saw me pump gas

With the children

At a convenience store

Like a punchline you get the next day,

Or a kiss in a dream that returns while

You're in the middle of doing

Something else.

I left money in his hand.

Mr. _____ who lives in _____,

South Carolina,

Of average height

And a certain weight

Who may or may not

Believe in any of the

Basic recognized religions,

Saw me move like an angel

In my dusky skin

And knit hat.

Perhaps I looked him in the eye.

Ms. _____ saw a glint of us

On which highway?

On the street that's close

To what landmark?

She now recalls

The two children in the back

Appeared to be behaving.

Mr. _____ now knows he heard

The tires of the car

Everyone is looking for

Crunch the gravel

As I pulled up,

In the wee, wee hours

At the motel where

He works the night desk.

I signed or didn't sign the register.

I took or didn't take the key from his hand.

He looked or forgot to look

As I pulled off to park in front

Of one of the rooms at the back.

Did I say I was traveling with kids?

Who slept that night

In the untouched beds?

*The italicized language
is from Susan Smith's
handwritten confession.*

BIRTHING

*When I left my home on Tuesday, October 25, I
was very emotionally distraught*

I have yet
To breathe.

I am in the back of her mind,
Not even a notion.

A scrap of cloth, the way
A man lopes down a street.

Later, a black woman will say:
"We knew exactly who she was describing."

At this point, I have no language,
No tongue, no mouth.

I am not me, yet.
I am just an understanding.

—————

*As I rode and rode and rode, I felt
Even more anxiety*

Susan parks on a bridge,
And stares over the rail.
Below her feet, a dark blanket of river
She wants to pull over herself,
Children and all.

I am not the call of the current.

She is heartbroken.
She gazes down,
And imagines heaven.

*I felt I couldn't be a good mom anymore, but I didn't want
my children to grow up without a mom.*

I am not me, yet.
At the bridge,
One of Susan's kids cries,
So she drives to the lake,
To the boat dock.

I am not yet opportunity.

*I had never felt so lonely
And so sad.*

Who shall be a witness?
Bullfrogs, water fowl.

*When I was at John D. Long Lake
I had never felt so scared
And unsure.*

I've yet to be called.
Who will notice?
Moths, dragonflies,
Field mice.

*I wanted to end my life so bad
And was in my car ready to
Go down that ramp into
The water*

My hand isn't her hand
Panicked on the
Emergency brake.

*And I did go part way,
But I stopped.*

I am not Gravity,
The water lapping against
The gravel.

*I went again and stopped.
I then got out of the car.*

Susan stares at the sinking.
My muscles aren't her muscles,
Burned from pushing.
The lake has no appetite,
But it takes the car slowly,
Swallow by swallow, like a snake.

*Why was I feeling this way?
Why was everything so bad
In my life?*

Susan stares at the taillights
As they slide from here
To hidden.

*I have no answers
To these questions.*

She only has me,
After she removes our hands
From our ears.