

**Why I Still Drive by the Abandoned  
Shell Station Belting out Bruce Springsteen**

*—Glory days, well they'll pass you by  
Glory days, in the wink of a young girl's eye*

Next week, it's time to go to confession.  
I need to commit a sin for forgiveness.  
Don't have a personal trainer to lust after.  
not too honest, but too timid to shoplift,  
what can I do? Would it be a sin  
to not put money in the offering—  
I know to take money from the plate  
would, but I do have my limits.

Life was not always this way. Back  
in the day, I'd have to choose  
what needed to be absolved first.  
Waiting for what would come later  
in the dark, I'd try to impress  
Cobra, Big Daddy, and Mongoose  
working on their muscle cars  
standing under Shell's garage bay lifts.

I'd go on about how my father who was  
born with a gift for staying poor, avoided  
mechanics like them. Lying on pavement,  
shoulders wedged under the chassis,  
Daddy taught me to make-do: baling  
wire the exhaust pipe to our truck's frame,  
never top off a leaking gas tank, drive  
55 to avoid 60-mile front end shimmy.  
Heat was from cardboard propped  
in front of the radiator. In winter,  
a screwdriver wedged in the throat  
of the carburetor, ether was sprayed  
into its bore to ignite the engine.

Back then, steppin' out over the line,  
weekends, nights with my petrol gods  
more than prepared me for the priest,  
as I'd slink into the confession booth  
on Sunday. Drag racing. Chrome-wheeled,  
fuel-injected suicide machines.

Fuelie heads and a Hurst transmission  
on the floor. Superbird, Rebel Machine,  
Boss Mustang 302, and Barracudas.  
Nitro-methane bulls belching tailpipes  
and fiery exhaust wringing the air  
where I'd stand by the pits, fruity aroma  
of fuel, acrid smoke from treadless tires  
I knew to call "slicks." Those memories  
have not grayed, have not sagged.  
If I can only manifest genuine contrition,  
maybe it's not too late to be a penitent,  
seek forgiveness for sins I never confessed.

## **Tin Lizzie**

If I could, I would bring my father back,  
not to give him another year to add  
to the three I gave him, holding back  
death as if it were the ski mask  
I pictured at night pushing at my door.

Taking years off newspaper calendars,  
removing his doctors' appointments  
from books, I'd give him 1932.  
He'd be eighteen, overalls crusted  
in manure. I'd find his driver's license,  
buy a 1927 Model T, fold a 20  
in his pocket, tell him to head on out  
for E-town taking along his brothers,  
Justus and Paul who knew to drive  
up steep hills backwards because  
the gas tank was always near empty.

I'd say to my father, is there anything  
else, anything? He only needs to ask.

## What Remains

No outhouse, one barn, no morning glories,  
nothing but bare earth that is so damn sad  
looking and ugly it makes my bones wince.  
I forget I was happy here. I alliterate:  
blighted, bleak. Now a wilderness, maybe  
the back field was beautiful with corn swaying.  
The pond was bulldozed over. Beans grow  
on its silt. The barn still holds the coughs  
of my father, my uncles, shaving from knives,  
stains of tobacco they spit on the floor.

The walnut trees were cut down for cash.  
No one was ever hung on a meat hook  
and beaten here. No canes of the blind ever  
tapped. Never anything really evil, only  
the bad, the human suffering that I did  
not see, hidden as it was in photographs.  
No one here knew the city, lost will to go on.  
There was always food of one kind or another.  
People could can if they had hands.

I see my father through chinks in barn walls  
suspending hay, watching out for copperheads  
woven into the bales. I don't know if he  
ever got drunk, but I'd like to think so,  
I'd like to have been there when he did.  
Hello Justus, Hello Paul, Hello Doc Hall,  
Hello Daddy. I am walking on hard red clay  
for you. Turn the deadbolt. I am home.