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A Cool Evening in September

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I know these four walls, then, of the room which is corporeal life: a kitten, a son, another Son, an African animal without soul, and I know, too, that another wall stands, its door open, and something beyond beckons to me to pass through. Finally, I know that the pentagram is the devil’s sign.

So I have made my beginning, will relate my parable, and give benediction in the name of the Holy Family: the blood of the Son, the pure, passionless Mother, the Father in whose fist is clenched our fate.

A COOL EVENING IN SEPTEMBER

I close the kitchen door on the chill breeze and sit back down at the table. Her ear is a punctured half-moon. From the lobe dangles a silver star. My eye aches down the long curve of her neck and shoulder, the snowflake purity of the blouse’s white sleeve, rests on the cast snake that circles her wrist. Her brown hand’s around a sweating glass. The light glints off her nails like frost. Our conversation is as brittle as ice, as still as legal papers, and makes me formal in my faded jeans and flannel shirt. Yes I’ve lost weight. OK I look good. No there’s not much here for fall colors with the trees so few and the culture here is pretty much the bars and television. At least, that’s the part she’d recognize.
What is it in us that makes us want to preserve a dead marriage in this ice?

I move to the enameled sideboard. Yes I've always been good at freshening drinks. Yes I may be the only man who keeps a pickle jar of margueritas in the fridge but I doubt it. I answer with my back to her. I clasp her glass in a shivering left hand, fight the urge to lift the rim to my lips. Ice is January in my right hand, in her glass. Tequila is February thaw, a slow week of temperatures in the forties, the steady melt of accumulated frost and ice in the joints, layer after layer of snow coming to face the sun again, each with its history of tracks of animals, the shapes of the wind's velocity and direction, until, standing in the mud, above a soggy autumn leaf, I recognize

in its brittle veins the origins of love.
I turn and finally, for once, meet her eyes.

SOMETHING FOR THE TELLING

"An old cowpoke went riding out . . ."

In each telling the madness of it comes on me again—the sledgehammer pulse, the crystalline night vision. Even now in my old age my nostrils flare to the smell of tequila at the thought, my throat thickens in each telling, and the piebald hand that rests on my stick steadies again.