



A Familiar House

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Andy lost it all behind concrete walls.
With hands stuck under sand, he
wishes for a window
to count clouds.

In the pasture behind our house,
I found you dancing with closed eyes.
As I walked over, you fell into the grass. I told you to stand,
but you declined and rolled to your side.
You asked me to sit, and I did, even though
the grass was wet.

Andy tells me he counts every night.
Counting helps him remember
it takes time to reach the end.
I ask what he counts. He says sand.

I lived in a white house with black windowpanes.
In my bedroom was a locked closet door and
my mother held the key. I asked to see what was
behind, she said never.

I worked in the woods, carving an ax from
stumps and stones. On a moonless night,
I took my ax to the closet door.
Inside were coats of fox and hare.

My father found the bird I shot, laid beneath our porch.
He called me over and held the dead bird in his hands.
He said to never kill beautiful creatures
unless I benefit from the hunt.
I was ashamed, even though it was accidental.

He roams the woods at night,
wearing nothing but fur.
Never cross Him,
He'll pull you into the desert.

Swallow the air I breathe
Learn to say only my name
Pleasure me, I am your king,
The Summoner of Sand

I found my brother singing in our mother's bedroom.
He held her cross in hand and swayed.
In a moment, he fell to his knees.
With mouth closed and cross pressed to his forehead,
he whispered my name as I turned to leave.

My brother told our mom he doesn't believe in God.
He and I sat in silence as she threw all the flowers we picked
for her out the window.
Her fury made me want him to apologize, but
his stubbornness is just as great as a mother's rage.
I wonder what our dad will say when my brother tells him
he has no God.

Behind four walls with no window, sit on a concrete bench
and count time by the passing of sand.
When there are no grains left, stand with both eyes open.
Remember the order of walls and try to climb the ceiling.

By the bedroom door, our father
stood with bow and arrow in hand.

He told us to go wait in the woods.

The sun was rising, and we felt guilty.
He never liked seeing sunrise.

Our father made a map through the woods.
He told us to have it memorized by night.
If we found our way out by morning, he'd let us
drink with him at dinner.

My brother found his way,
but I never did. And now,
I watch through the window as they drink.

We sit on concrete steps and I ask for a secret.
You tell me that there are no secrets to believe.
I say tell a lie. Now, you can't stop lying.

In the city of dust, I lost my faith.
To the Summoner, I gave my name in fear of godlessness.
He mimics the flow of water and fills my lungs with sand.

Words drip in shades of sand.
His tongue breaks from dry heat.

Like a god, I call Him the Summoner of Sand.
He eats the black and white in my eyes so
I see in grey.

If I count every night,
He'll let me know how much longer I have to wait.

Listen to Him and He'll bring you to me.
He only asks for the counting of sand.

In one hand He holds the white moon. In the other,
He lets the desert flow off His fingertips. He puts salt in the
sky and pulls tree roots out of the ground. Never look Him in
His eye or He'll blind you with a cloud of dust.

My father found me in the closet, grieving
our dead dog. He looked down with little sympathy
and told me to get his shovel.

My mother cooked duck in the oven. I watched for hours,
wondering how all the feathers burned off. When I asked if
she knew how, she laughed and told me to go down by the
pond to count how many ducklings were left.

The Summoner of Sand
knows my name.
He tore it from lip and tongue.

He runs towards the desert and
I try to call Him back but
I've already forgotten my name.

Our father looked out the front door every night. He searched for deer, but could never see yellow eyes. Our mother walked over to put her hand on his shoulder. He only stared deeper into the woods.

By morning, he sighed and opened the front door. He found ten dead deer shot through their eyes.
He wanted to know who went hunting without him.

I harvest grains of sand to honor His name.
Before His altar, I've collected piles.
Under blue light, He comes to
judge my work.

I count to the thousandth grain, and hang
each one from the ceiling
with the finest thread.

My fingers are not enough to tie all these strings.
There is blood on the knots and I can't keep
count of how many are left.

My father said cut down the oak and use the wood to build
an altar for those who forgot the name of Christ.

I cut off my tongue
and cast it in a block of concrete.
By the ocean,
I throw it under waves.
Soon, it will become sand.

My brother climbed to the top of a tree.
I asked what he saw. He said,
you, brother, and your infinite smallness.
I took it as a joke and laughed.

In our childhood house,
voices sing about the nights
when we ran between the trees,
chasing after a phantom dog,
lost in the pursuit of deer.

My mother covered my eyes with paint.
She sealed my eyelids and there was color in the dark.
I asked when would I see our home again.
She didn't answer and began to paint my lips.

Andy to Willy,

I thought you would find me in the desert.
There are mountains of sand on top of mountains.
Sometimes, the peaks are covered white.

I've never seen snow in the desert.
It's not the same as it is in the woods.
Nothing is the same here, but I don't mind.

My mother smiled at me as we said our prayers.
She said she was proud that I knew every word.
I told her it's hard to remember until you mean it.

The Summoner of Sand rises with the wind.
Like a cloud of dust, He falls across the land.
His voice is heard by those who wait.

In the woods, our father told us he found the Body of Christ
between two stones. Our mother called him a liar.
She knew Christ hung in the windows at church.

Willy to Andy,

I'm lonely in the woods now that you're stuck under sand.
The trees stand differently and all the birds are dead.

I told my father I want to be a farmer.
He stared and began to laugh at me.
Soon my mother joined and then my brother.
Even our dead dog buried outside started to laugh.
But farming was the clearest thought of my life.

My brother went out to hunt mountain lions.
They'd chase him up trees with yellow claws and white teeth.
When there were more than three, he'd shoot their eyes.

Tied by the feet, he dragged the lions to our shed,
and hung the meat and fur to dry.

Back home, I asked if he was afraid of the outdoors.
He pulled a mountain lion claw from his arm
and said of course.

In a mirage, I walk to the city of dust
with nothing covering my eyes.
There's a building made of sand with red windows.
The city has no trees,
only giant cacti that reach up to dust clouds.

It starts to rain diamonds, hard as hail.
The mud roads shatter and
I take shelter under a car made of concrete.
There's a dead dog inside saying
you're locked in the building of sand.

All at once, the clouds drop from the sky,
expelling a wave of dust.
When it settles,
I walk to the center of the city.

Behind a window, you stare back at me.
You hold a bucket of water in your hand.
I ask if you remember your name.

Pushing out the red glass,
you release your grasp.
As water runs down, the wall deteriorates
into a pile of dust. I leave the city with you
stuck under a mountain of sand.

Andy writes
to say concrete walls are cold even in the desert.
He can't remember the color of wood and
wants to see more than sand.
I try to remind him of home.

I will harvest every grain of sand to prove to my father that I
am capable of doing something he cannot. He tells me about
the time when he collected all the clouds from the sky. But
that will be a joke when I gather mountains of sand.

I raised my voice to my father one night.
He looked at me and rose from his chair. He walked to the
front door and left.
That night, he stood out in the cold with no shoes.
The next morning he blamed me for his frostbite.

Behind the altar, I count windowpanes to stay awake.
Each sentence from the priest was like a curse,
putting my eyes to sleep.

My mother would be ashamed if she knew I stopped listening,
but it's hard to pay attention with all those lines.

I stared at the stained glass crucifixion and wondered if
counting was sacrilegious. But this was the
Body of Christ, it's meant to be seen,
and counted. So I count.

Tell me your name, little brother.
I forgot it when I left you in the woods.
Does it rhyme still?

My mom watched me read at night.
She helped with the words I didn't know,
but she always fell asleep before the last page.

Andy: Let's go for a walk.
Willy: Where to?
Andy: Nowhere too nice or pretty.
Willy: Okay, sure.

Mom would cry if she knew his sacrilege,
but I'll pray that he sees more while in the desert.
I don't blame him for false idols.

My father said to shoot straight
through the deer's eye.

I tried, but I gave the deer a royal name
and it felt like killing a king.
Each horn a diamond.

Take me to the sea for an ocean death.

From now on, you will only know the driest touch.
There's nothing more, follow me further,
deep into sand.

Tell me when you'll be home and
I'll wear my grey denim for you.
Our church will never see blue.

Ribcage, surround me
and play a melody only
you and I can hear.

My mother told me to throw away the bones of our dead dog.
But she knew how much I loved him.
I kept his skeleton on a shelf above my bed and
picked bouquets of white and yellow flowers to
lay at his feet.
She said it was satanic to keep bones in the house, but
I wouldn't listen.

Andy lost his favorite arm
in a fight against a man with no eyes.
His fist smashed hard against the blind man's face
and his bones shattered. Now he can't write letters.

My brother and I went out in the night.
We searched for mountain lions until morning.
With teeth and fur in arm, we'd march home.
Our father would be proud of the one who shot the animal.
It was always my brother, but I didn't mind.
Pride was the first sin.

We buried our dog in the woods.
When it snows, I go and sit besides the tombstone we built.
It's cold, but I don't mind.

Our father told my brother to go upstairs and get his gun.

He said he'll find the creature that lives under my bed. He
wants me to hold the gun to its head.

Summoner of Sand, what are you now but
an effigy of my sins?

I am what I am, a pile of sand.

I stayed out in the woods far too long.
I never knew fear until you weren't here.

You said they kept to mountaintops,
but I swear, I'm staring one down.

I'm still a boy, who's afraid of mountain lions,
and I wish my older brother was home.

The Summoner of Sand speaks His name.
He says my brother wants a god no more.
I look into His eyes, like deer in the night.

I don't need to know your name.
You're nothing more than a dust devil,
shifting with the wind.
We'll count clouds once again.

My father was stabbed in the chest while out hunting.
By morning, I found his body, warmed by the sun.
I sat next to him and stared.
There was blood and grass and torn fabric.
I put a flower in his wound and stood to find my brother.
My father told me to hurry.

My dad hunts in the woods.

He asked us to go with him.

Andy listened well.

But I could never kill.

A father's shame and a son's guilt are no remedy
for splitting bones.

Nothing looks the same, but I still like the woods.

I stumble past trees, forgetting what's gone,
the land between or concrete walls.

I try to remember while the woods keep me far.

I should have written Andy more letters.
I am a fool with the same amount of time.

Ride with me to a familiar house.

I want to walk through halls,
and stand in our old bedroom.

The shadows stayed the same, but
I don't know if you see them as I do.

Turn around and tell me it feels good to be home,
even if it doesn't. And I'll say the same to you.

The Summoner of Sand lingers behind
concrete walls now that I no longer count. He offers His hand
one last time, but I know He is only
made of sand.

Under new light, Andy bows to the desert.

No longer choking on sand
he stands with composure.

Wanting to walk home together,
he fears crossing this land alone.

Sitting between boulders half covered in moss,
I forget how concrete feels.

My dog runs between trees, chasing deer tracks.
White coat against the woods,
he's a phantom dog.

This is better than the desert,
I never want to be a cowboy again.

My brother, you favored destruction and now
sit alone, a shadow with no home.

In our old house, you wilted mom and me.
I saw your death in reverie, unsure
if you'd be missed. I miss you now.

You swore I should never come out,
but you're behind concrete walls
and I'm afraid we're forgetting our names.
This fear is greater than wrath.

It's been eight years since your father died, but you can still
have mine. Our mother only knows the word
empathy. She needs you more. My brother,
don't die in the desert.

I missed your birthday and you miss the color green.
Home feels distant, but when you're back,
we'll go to church to make mom happy.

Tell me of the heat and I'll go
collect the sand at your feet.
I'll carry it back so we'll never forget sins.
My brother, no need to run with broken bones.

I wanted you to apologize, not to me, but for your sins.
You couldn't with your voice drowned in sand.
I hear you now and feel guilty. I have everything green,
and you live in grey.

My brother, ask for something green and
I promise to send photos of Long Meadow.

