

*Hillbilly Music*

by

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*Shenandoah*

Just because  
you've never been

to a place  
except in song

doesn't mean  
it can't feel

like home.

## **I. Sunup**

*Cast of Characters*

Seth.....	Seventh son of the Susquehanna, born and raised in central PA. Where are you going, boy?
Q.....	Older brother, first in the kiln, foreman of Seth's Work Crew.
Father.....	Hallowed be thy name, your kids will come and will be done with work at six or seven, gives up his day for daily bread.
Mother.....	Carries discipline of God and Law, bringer of life and witness to death, separated from Father with a river in between.
The Carter Family.....	Country Music's first family, circled round the dawn of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century.
Work Crew (chorus).....	Older men dressed in dirt and pine needles, harnessed and hanging from the balcony of branches.
Leadbelly.....	Carves statues out of songs. It doesn't matter where you've been, only where you're headed.
Bob.....	Scrap-hunter, junkman with gold plated valves.

Mississippi John Hurt.....	Songster, guitar-picker, could sing a river to sleep. We may not look or sound alike, but we all just want to make it to the sea.
Stink-Eye Sam.....	Lost his left eye in a barfight with a dogfish shark, known to eat discarded boat props.
Dewey Buckets.....	Seth's first alter, rose to fame after brief detainment, born beneath a waterfall, last seen in upstate New York.
Bucket.....	Dewey's only daughter, a method for consuming marijuana involving a water-filled bucket, an empty water bottle, and the all-pervasive force of gravity.
Best Western.....	Occasional residence of Seth, Q, and the Work Crew.
Rammahead Spitta.....	Second alter, acts on impulse, chases fights, maintains a love-hate relationship with Trouble.
The Woods.....	Secrets in a jar, know how to make new out of the old, the original Appalachian ballad.
Landslide.....	Carefree alter, prefers companionship to violence, favorite artists include: Lil B, Kool AD, Trinidad James, Flying Lotus.

Croak..... Night song, road to Seth's  
childhood home, word for life  
or death; a stick drawn across  
tiny ridges plays all of these at  
once. Even when we can't tell  
where we're going, there are  
noises that tell us we are  
home.



## *Catfish*

We start at midnight,  
piercing chicken livers  
with hooks. We throw  
temptations into water  
inky like the hour.

Juicy J comes on car speakers,  
everyone waiting. We shoot the shit,  
our poles resting in tubes, looking  
for some action. Mine pulls down,  
pointing a long fiberglass finger  
at the prize, so I pull up  
quick, with force and clarity  
of purpose. Juicy J don't give a shit  
as I reel in a face

full of slimy whiskers.

We're both gasping.

It would bite my hand if it could,

a quick bit of payback,

but I don't let it. Less

successful companions

have less greasy hands.

They want what I got.

*Early Spring*

Darkness & dirt  
are all I know.  
I witness other  
seedlings grow,

coaxed up  
by an Indian  
Summer's day,  
stretching out  
revealing petals  
to promises  
never intended

as guarantees.  
They never were  
supposed to be.

The warmth of soil  
has not escaped me,  
though the pressure  
to grow knows my name.  
A broken shell is nothing  
but empty shouting. "Broken"  
does not have to be anyone's  
last word.

## *Money Tree*

At 11, Father wanted me to know  
what \$1 was worth. He showed me  
how to find it in backyards  
and rusted lots where scrap grew  
out of the ground. Summers,  
I learned how to crush metal into cash  
with either Q or Bob  
when Father was at work. Bob taught  
me how even the broken  
can be valuable. He'd come  
and gone like the junk in his arm,  
but eventually found himself strong without it.  
Bob knew what it was like to unintentionally cut,  
but also how to get better from the bleeding.  
Q got a real job,  
and then it was just me and Bob  
manning the back hoe, crushing cars,  
pressing down and squeezing the last bit of cash  
out of metal bodies, hauling away  
the remains of some trailer trash  
trash trailer no one else wanted.

Bob also knew how to drive  
without a license.  
He drove me to the bank  
to cash checks many times  
more than my first dollar.  
Father came too. Proud  
whenever the teller told him  
that I made a lot of money  
for someone my age,  
that I really knew  
how to make a buck. One summer,

Bob and I were removing the gas tank  
from a long-dead truck. Bob looked at it  
with recognition, a familiar surgery,  
said he used to be heavy too.  
My father knew this, I realized,  
as Bob's kind look challenged  
the decomposing frame. His unoxidized expression  
was worth more than I'd known.  
He told me how the real worth of a single bill  
is in knowing that you haven't been

completely spent. The truck folded in on itself,  
as I watched, entirely upright.

## *Fireball*

Wind blows the fire in all directions,  
trying to burn the feet of anyone  
who forgets to pay attention.  
We are a drunk circle of friends.  
It is not my house and not my fire.  
We found each other years ago,  
when I was still the bad kid on the bus,  
or at least that how my one friend  
who also rode that bus said he saw me.  
It's his house and his fire.  
Someone asks why that Shane kid  
is mad at me. I told him it's because  
Shane thinks he's tough, trying to start shit  
even though I'd kick his ass.  
We're all high too. The wind twists  
the fire up into the air  
like a tornado  
and we all look up  
even though we've seen this  
before. Out of nowhere flashes  
a bottle of Everclear, and me and my neighbor  
take sips and everyone else is afraid of it,  
and we're all drunk and high,  
and no one is saying anything,  
so I put the bottle to my mouth  
and blow into the fire which explodes  
in my face in a flash of clarity.  
We haven't seen this before,  
so everyone is excited. The wind  
dies down, and I do it again.

*The Road Leading Home*

A black bridge  
of falling bolts  
glass-dusted underbelly  
graffiti, rocks  
railroad track.

A narrow lane  
leading along  
sliced open mountainside  
shaded overhang  
blind, sudden turns.

A wooded path  
sidled up against the town—  
a so-called city—  
a different kind of quiet  
between the hairs  
of a rolling green blanket.

A farmer's plot  
of stalks  
ripe rows to hide in  
the summer  
bare in  
the winter.

A river  
always moving  
in that same direction,  
a road nobody needed to build,  
going so far, through so much space.  
You're always going away and always  
coming back.

## **II. Graft**

*Hillbilly Music*

Will the circle  
unbroken  
by the sky  
be waitin'  
some place better?

We come  
take branches  
away on a cold n'  
cloudy day.

Haulin' mother,  
drive slow.  
Glad to see 'em go.  
Grab the haul n'  
Take 'er under-  
neath her home  
near the power-  
lines in the sky.

Circle, Lord  
be broken,  
waitin'  
for a better home,  
a place we don't  
know somewhere  
in the sky.



*Paycheck*

Quick wit kind boy  
settles hands in ground,  
reaches down, finds sharp  
stone. Ground bites back.

Cut hands heal,  
pink lines turn white as  
smoke.

Father re-disappears.  
Hands find money,  
a trace of him.  
Left for support.  
Paycheck buys food,  
buys a whole week  
to themselves.

*Motherside*

Split wood  
with Father.

Go to church  
with Mother.

Crazy like  
Westboro.

“God hates fags.”  
Then God is stupid.

No swimming  
with mother

because her brother  
drowned alone.

She cannot  
leave me and Q alone.

Mother for rednecks,  
cooks and cleans,

deputy of house  
and courthouse.

Got some good  
hook-ups there.

*Broken Beer*

Smash bottle down  
and hit my beer for foam,  
fuck you, Q,  
forget you're crazy  
strong. Trying to make bubbles

rise, like we both grow  
up into men.  
Now holding

a broken bottle,  
making a crown

from shattered lips.  
A sip spills  
glass in my mouth.  
I spit out  
like broken teeth,

the ones some guys around here are missing:  
holey mouths, but no God,  
no crowns.  
We drink until it's gone.

*Room to Grow*

We often find secret sheds out here,  
little houses tucked away  
with no intention of being found,  
trees within trees. Usually,  
the men who built them hurry out  
when they see us coming.  
I see ATV's speed back and forth  
through the trees, and I know  
we're near a den of forbidden flowers.

We never get anyone  
into trouble. Many of us have  
enough of it ourselves, although I wouldn't  
put it past some crew to take  
a bouquet home with them.  
Maybe this is what the racing men suspect.

An older and possibly wiser guy once  
told me he could really go for a J  
if he had someone  
to share it with.

He sounded hungry. I refused,  
even though I was hungry too.

*Cougar Nite*

at a best western begins  
long after our drinks. women enter  
like a high school reunion. cups in hand,  
they look for a meal.  
an old cat catches me  
and i submit. dancing,  
her fleshy thighs embrace my crotch  
and i look for something  
to hold on to. she thrusts one way  
and my hips move with her.  
her underarms have a rhythm  
of their own. a co-worker moves in,  
"you know he's only 19."  
her eyes extinguish blood  
rushing back into my head.  
"you didn't care when you thought i was 21."  
"honey," she says, "i have a son  
who is a year older than you.  
if i stayed what would that make me?"  
i go to buy a drink. "not  
until you're older" the bartender taunts. with liquor  
on my breath i yell  
"yeah well in 2 years i'll be 21  
and you'll still be fat as shit."

i stumble up to my room  
and go to bed dripping and raw.

*Faded Light*

All I wanted was unfiltered affection,  
and you handed me a heap  
of brown and yellow grains.  
If I had known how hard  
they would feel between my teeth  
I might have suggested stones instead.

In a Scotch-soaked fit of dancing,  
we tried to fit everything into place,  
as if we could do more  
than simply rearrange the furniture.

I think the stars are getting stronger  
as our atmosphere disintegrates.  
I can feel the light shining through  
my molars whenever I grin.  
“I don’t want to be scraped away,”  
you say. With my mouth full  
of starlight, I do my best to sing  
an old tune about seeds and stars  
and broken teeth. I spray some of it out  
and choke on the rest.

## *40 Nite*

Another night brought a broken rave.  
Glo-Stick blood and splintered chairs occupied  
the hotel room because the power was out,  
and our food had gone bad, and fate, that shitty GPS,  
had taken us by a liquor store on the way home  
from work. Different crews mixed for the first time  
since the cougar hunt. At some point, Q's empty bottle  
breezed by my head, so I returned the favor  
with my own, missing, adding teeth  
to the parking lot through an open door.

I could not partake in the eventual expedition  
for bare-chested women. I slept. Banging  
in the morning, a "Time-for-work!" penetrated  
the 40 oz. fog. "Get that, Q," I told the foreman. That day  
I failed to make my chainsaw purr.

*Dewey Buckets: Police Song*

If you thought the law could hold me  
then those cops have got you fooled.  
I'm spittin' fresh off parole, we  
ain't gonna be in the hold  
of some fucking hog-ass old  
rules that don't even know me.

You know I'm Dewey Buckets  
cuz we only doin buckets,  
take a water bottle, suck  
all the smoke that fills it up.  
Water pouring out the side,  
the police gonna let this slide  
cuz they only make their business  
where the money's comin with it.

So the long dick of the law  
can try giving me a call  
and chase the smoke that sprawls  
from my water-bottle-fall.



### **III. Exhale**

*Landslide: Freestyle*

Imma bout to pulla trigga  
Dick is only gettin bigga  
But you know I'm not a killa  
I'm an Ace-uh clubs,  
Landslide thug  
Drippin poker chips n love  
Like a basement fulla tacks.

Natural disaster  
Fuckin fuckin with a plaster  
dick. No trick. Ice cold  
master switch, white birds:

doves n shit.

*Trial*

At 14 I had  
my trial-by-bike

competitions and rock  
climbing with tires

with motors  
without a seat

break disks  
breaking, flat-

tires, torn open  
on sharp stones

three bikes  
blew their engines

because off-road  
racing punches

where you'd least expect  
up the ranks

races go down valleys  
up boulders

to make it  
8-feet high

you must  
hit tire 45°

compress shocks  
unload legs—

hold clutch  
count to 3

hold bike  
wide open

move body  
looking up

let it take you  
to the top

learn to fly.

*Pocket Knife*

There's a never-ending party  
in my pants, and we're all invited.  
Just unlock the belt and pay  
the button the entry fee.  
The zipper will let you in.

If you're a friend, you can follow me  
up the left pant leg  
and sneak past security.  
I'll show you the fire  
in my back pocket. We can sit  
around it, drinking apple pie moonshine  
since we're friends. I'll tell you about how  
this party is still going on, how some people  
refuse to leave. I told everyone  
to smoke cigarettes in the other back pocket,  
but we can smoke in this one. Because we're friends

sharing this jar of apple and moon,  
I'll mention how it'll never stop burning  
up there or down here, how no one will  
ask it to. It's fun,

but sometimes it feels too late.  
Sometimes I'll take my knife and cut a little hole  
and sneak away for a bit. You can come too,  
but just you, friend.

*All the Roads Leading Home*

Preserved in green and white,  
like a frog's empty cry,  
*Croak Hollow*,  
a tilted slender sign  
turning silver in the light.

The gravel road pulls you  
farther down, endless  
into hills,  
where mountain laurel looks  
with humid steam  
and streams  
like another hemisphere,  
a narrow path ravine-  
ing into deep bluegreens.

Hold tight to the bends,  
the right turns,  
to find a surprisingly familiar  
old place,  
like how you moved  
through so much space  
only bend back  
towards where you began,  
roads taking you  
so far from where you started,  
to find yourself next door  
in the same woods  
you've always known.

*Goodnight*

Irene, if rambling and gambling  
and staying out in the strip clubs  
at night is too much  
to make me your man,  
then I guess I'm not your man.

But before you say goodnight, Irene,  
just tell me where's your morphine,  
that little bit of take-you-away,  
which you need and need to hide  
and will drown you in the river,  
drag you down the side?  
Because I know it isn't me anymore.

Good God, Irene, I asked  
your father for you,  
and he took me up like a son.  
And still you're gone,  
I'll never see your face.  
If only either of us hadn't been born.

It was a good fight,  
Irene, and there'll be no  
more good nights for me.  
But one thing's still the same:  
I'll see you in my dreams.

#### **IV. De Capo**



*Susquehanna Gon' Hurt (Sometimes)*

Ain't nobody's dirty business  
How I treat myself  
Nobody's business but mine

If I wake up boozy  
Feeling a hard fist  
Pressing my eyes  
Then I'll swing back

If I punch you in the face  
It's because you need it  
And it's our punch  
No one else's  
Something we can't share

If I write you a letter  
That's between us  
Nobody's business but ours

If I want to kick the dirt  
Shake it up  
Whatever the cloud becomes  
That's mine too

*Carved on a Tree Near a Burned Down Hut;  
or, Nightsong in the Morning*

Above this river  
nothing moves,  
the trees have today off,  
won't even  
produce small breaths;

All of the birds recovering still.  
I tell myself, *Soon,*  
*You'll rest as well.*

*To Lost Love and Rum*

I twist you open, and look you in your one eye,  
and you look back at my open one,  
and neither of us are really sure of the other.  
“Can you handle me?” asks your high proof stink.  
“Can I handle you?” I like to think I can handle  
your sour-mouthed kiss. I like to think you want  
my mouth as much as it wants you. We promised  
each other so much at the beginning. You were so sweet  
before you burned me down. You made me feel good  
before you made me sick.  
Now I can’t even tell the difference.

*Rammabhead Spitta: Reflections*

Crossbow and I'm ready to go.

For real dis dude is out-in the-woods  
For real dis dude is hard-as a-tree  
For real dis dude is me  
Biggest high school redneck: 2013

Takin care of my shit in the streets  
Flashing, throwing lightning in the streets  
Fuckin up dudes tryna mess with me

*\*hits bong\**  
[new track plays]

Three bowls strong  
I'm ready for da song  
Always ready for a fight  
If you're standing in my sight

But it don't have to be so wrong  
If you wanna get along  
Hey...where's my friend, White?  
Gonna kiss him good night

*Communion*

I.

There's a sort of feeling  
you only get when you're born  
with a stone in your eye.  
But you must be able to understand  
the dust of it all, the rigid  
language of bark, the hard  
but still soft grazing against your cheek  
that makes up childhood.

There are places where only you visit,  
but you know others have been there too,  
initials carved long ago into rock with another rock  
that you found and so share through this space  
each other's personal world: a Father often gone,  
but still a father, a Mother pressing down  
as hard as she can because that's a form love takes,  
a brother to spit on and fight  
because you're both spitting and fighting  
and want to secure each other's strength.

There are private places that we can all share,  
and sure as you don't know mine,  
we've found similar objects to hold onto  
and turn over in our hands,  
memorizing their textures and ridges,  
working out the bones underneath,  
using these bones as a model for the world  
we've yet to discover  
and using them to pick our teeth.

## II.

A large, sweeping, grassy hill in the summer  
can serve as someone's back yard  
and as a place to find music.

A large, sweeping, grassy hill in the summer  
is where hundreds gather to drink and laugh  
as we wait for the next act to come on.

A stage down at the bottom of this dirt-y theater  
looks across scattered fold-out chairs and RV's  
and waits for the next bluegrass band to come on.

The stage at the bottom allows this place to be a theater.  
It calls out the hula-hoops and tie-dye dresses and children.  
It calls out the vendors of homespun goods and the sun.

We've been here for two days and wait for one more,  
listening to folk music carried from below by the wind,  
drinking moonshine and calling out the sun.

For two days and for one more, we only know this place,  
its music and its people, their various sounds,  
and the way it changes from day to night.

By day it is structure, a schedule, workshops and families.  
By night the children are gone or asleep. We unfold.  
Everyone keeps drinking, and grey-haired men grab their bongos,  
and somewhere someone has a bag of mushrooms.

### III.

A family is a line  
and a circle.

It moves forward

by reproducing itself  
in different ways.

This is what makes us brothers.

#### IV.

A beat connects the rhythm  
to the flow,  
and Tupac is still dead.

God knows we all miss him.  
Gone, though  
he lives on in our heads.

There was supposed to be unity,  
East and West,  
Blue and Red.

But a game got us thinking  
those other dudes  
are better off dead.

Cuz we're from different places  
we think different,  
they're not my brother  
is what someone said.

And it's true. We have  
different minds.  
We don't know each other,  
and Biggie is still dead.



V.

We eventually find others  
Who themselves have found us  
And form a communion  
That no one suspected  
We learn to crawl on two feet  
Together on two feet  
We want to show them  
Our secret place  
But can't find our way back  
When we're not alone  
We decide it doesn't matter  
As we carve out a new shelter  
To fit everyone into  
They bring their own small stones  
We all hang posters on the wall  
And in a way it approximates  
Our individual space  
But gets expanded  
To include foreign spices  
Seeds from exotic places  
We learn what we each have to offer  
And marvel at what gets created  
Through unexpected combinations  
We still return to our personal spaces  
Because we can never give them up  
Just as we can never share them completely  
But at midnight  
when we cast out catfish lines  
we can pick which fire  
burns at our back

## VI.

Eventually a man has to work rather than chore.  
Some decisions come naturally  
like working alongside your brother.

It takes a crew of men for each job.  
The company has you cut branches.  
Your Crew has you harnessed in a tree.  
Some of them have been working this job  
as long as your father. Some have not.  
Some of them can't tie a good knot regardless,  
even when your security is on the line.  
Many Crew members have made bad decisions  
like smoking rocks and shards and holes into their smile.  
But just as many just work for the money.

It is good money,  
especially right out of high school.  
You've never known so much wealth  
or freedom. As you walk through the woods  
to your next location, you know what it's like  
to make your own way in the world.  
You might spend the night at a hotel  
near the site because the job took you  
too far from your bed, and if you want a drink  
after the shift, no one would tell you not to.  
Because you worked for it.  
God knows you earned it.

## VII.

There is no end of the line,  
whatever anyone might say.  
I'm gonna keep moving  
til' the day I die,  
and even then I'll probably stay on.  
Have you ever seen the end of a river?  
Because as far as I can tell  
it only just gets bigger and bigger.  
And that's me.  
Don't say you never knew me  
because you just watched me flow by,  
stopping for nothing.  
We're all just going on and on,  
and we may never intersect,  
never find the same hemisphere,  
but I know what makes you move.  
The same thing is in me too.

*Power Lines*

Cutting limbs just isn't cutting  
it. Branches reaching for a line,  
a voice to talk to,  
pay the price for trying  
to hold electricity. Communication  
runs at 750 kA through chords  
like tin cans. Voices spark,  
threatening to burn the forest down.

I make sure those trees keep to themselves,  
providing the companionship they desire  
just long enough to break their arms.  
I'd prefer a different kind of operation,

swinging arms of heavy steel,  
adding instead of subtracting.  
I could hold electric ropes with them  
and let the voices run through me.  
I could use these arms  
to lift a roof into the air.  
I could live beneath it. There,  
I'd have no fear of burning down.



*Susquehanna*

This river, baby,  
is a wild stream, licking  
in a common tongue.  
Winding roads have rocks  
even when slow.  
Don't go thinking  
I wouldn't run up and down  
this coast, cutting through  
trees and even the remains  
of mountains. Sus-  
kwuh-Hannah moves like life-  
blood pushing through a vein.