Psalm for an Eldorado prophet

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Psalm for an Eldorado prophet

by

Mary Ann Hudson

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS

Major: English (Creative Writing)

Major Professor: Debra K. Marquart

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Ames, Iowa

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Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Mary Ann Hudson

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signature redacted for privacy
Dedication

For my parents, and for Dorothy Mae Jenkins-Hudson.

For Matthew, always.
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The first picture she ever drew told anyone anything they needed to know about her. The lines were already there, fitting themselves the only way they could around every cell and every pulse and every push of breath. She was five, and everyone thought that she was slow except for her mother, but those lines haunted out of the cold wax crayon and laid on the rough paper as if channeled, summoned, called to, and her stiff, new picture of the hills that slipped into Eldorado was a transcription of the shape of her mind as it was tattooed into the backs of her eyes. She drew them over and over, this one with cows, this one had fences, one with roads, one without, one at night, one with a yellow sun, the very best one with an erupting blast smeared with every hot color right from the middle of the paper so that when her mother held it up to praise it, it caught fire and burned every tip of her mother’s fingers.
Dot

Eldorado waits just where the world flattens out again, and it is not a city of gold. It does not cast rays of indescribable light from behind the taller landscape of the Flint Hills, announcing some kind of obvious direction to let yourself be pulled to. She always wanted to let herself believe him, that a glitter did cling to the air around the sky around the town. That the last road that led you into town illuminated the ditches around it as if the world touching the edges of this place were gilded. Nothing ever happened to her when she let herself try, when she let her eyes open up over the last swell on the turnpike and looked carefully through her eyelids that she slowly opened from a squint. If he was in the car with her, she could watch him transform, his muscles release and expand, his legs grow longer, his face and hair and eyes take on a hundred colors and sizzle against his skin like heated wires. Sometimes, if she could see what his eyes were reflecting, she could see an explorer’s paradise, a place with light and spires, like a place filled with kings. But her own eyes saw only a facade, a curtain made for the unfaithful, a place filled with all the regular smoke and brown of a medium-sized Kansas oil town.

King was different. She had known him all her life like a twin and she understood him not at all. He had big, big hands like a horse doctor or a pianist, and when they went to school the kids had made fun of his strange way of
talking, and his small body for his hands and head, and she remembers that they called him crazy. She was his friend because she had known him first, and because she was so familiar with the teasing and the childhood stonings that they had fallen away somewhere behind her into a kind of high-pitched humming din. They had both been held back for the same grades, she because they said she was retarded, he because school was a distraction from his true calling. When they finally graduated together, she had thought what a strange pair they must make with her skinny dullness and his uneven blindingness.

He gave her a gift that day, a rock that when it turned in her palm, became gold.

Her mother told her again and again, and told the school again and again, that there was nothing wrong with her brain. She wasn’t ever sure because she stood out, that was obvious, and it wasn’t because she was overly smart. It didn’t matter. She had King for a friend, she had her parents and could stay with them in their house. She had diary and she wrote in it every night.

Last night I had a dream I can’t explain. I am running into a house that is not my house, it is old and gray but it sits where ours does by the refinery. I am running from the yard and it is night, but the black color in the sky can’t stay fixed, it moves like ink in a bowl of water. The refinery is exploding, again and again and it is so loud I have to hold my heart in my chest. It is hot, hotter than summer. When I reach the house King is there, wrapped in one of his grandma’s quilts, shivering. I crawl under the quilt with him and hold him and he is trying to talk to me but I can’t hear him over the noise. He is so thin I feel like he is going to break.
Where Prophets Live

You should know that in the part of the midwest, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Nebraska, and only very rarely, Iowa, when the town Eldorado is brought up in conversation, one out of ten people will remember a relative that they think lives there, or is possibly already buried, someone on their mother's side, they think. Eldorado isn't so big, but it is a turnpike town, and the memory very easily finds life and lives lived in the simple repetition of seeing a name on a green exit sign even more than a few times. A mother's relative is born, goes to school, falls in loves, raises children, dies, all because of trips through Kansas City, Wichita, Oklahoma City. The turnpike is long here, Eldorado is a relief from the unrelentless swells of the Flint Hills, of a part of Kansas only a Kansan has a real heart for.

On hot days, on damper days, on the right kind of wind days, you smell Eldorado before you see it. The air is rushing through your car vents, your windows, over your head from a convertible top, and the air gets close and leaden, it wrinkles the soft matter of your frontal lobe, there is a warning of a headache, a rush in your thoughts to identify a smell. Sulfur, exhaust, somehow begin to describe it, but it resists, cloaks the air, forces you to breathe it, take it in. Natives will curl their upper lips over their bottom, create a
makeshift filter for breathing shallowly, close off their noses, roll up the windows, slide shut the vents. You will not think of this, it starts to go away as you pass over the man-made lake that eases into North Eldorado, you will drive on past fields of white tanks as big as office buildings, for a moment think of oil, forget it all by Emporia, by Andover, by the time you’ve rushed by. It’s accessed later, at an introduction, someone’s from Eldorado, isn’t there a great aunt from around there?

Around there, people have been born, learned, fallen in love, raised children, died. They live in the new drywalled split-levels just outside town, in trailer parks permanent as the location of the First United Methodist, in motor lodges, in in-town homes that once tried to be Victorians, Cape Cods, Colonials, in rows and neighborhoods of prefabricated homes that came to a bare yard in giant, slotted pieces for new families to put together, to host grandchildren in. They live here, graduate from a highschool where no names change except to blend into offspring, they cruise down Main to fall into the arms of each other in record-heat summers, there are families made and re-made and known, and there is a cemetery like everywhere else, everywhere else is the same medium-sized Kansas town as Eldorado, everywhere else is the same except for the white tanks as big as office buildings that make long shadows over houses, endless houses, over schoolyards, over Main street, over the church, over, like a partly cloudy day that smells like the first few minutes of hell.

But like every other unlikely place, a prophet was born and lived a life here. No one recognized him except for one other person, and maybe she’s
from your mother's side, maybe you've met her once at a family reunion or picnic when you were young or just married, or maybe your mother told a story about her once. It must have been her that you met, that you know, could be a second cousin or great aunt, because prophets are related to no one, and after they have done their work, they always leave town.
I have known King since I was a little girl and I still sometimes feel like I don't know anything about him. We went to the oil museum today and no one ever goes there, but we have been at least three times in the last few months. There isn't anything there but old china from the old hotel, stuff that looks like it was from people's attics, and the scale model of the refinery. Also some maps. I can't think of anything more boring but King goes and gets so quiet, like he is getting into some place inside of himself no one has ever been but him. Last week he looked at the hotel things for almost a whole hour, and after told me a story about a kid who was killed playing on an oil pump. Today, he stared at the model of the refinery for ever. The only time he talked to me was to tell me stuff I already knew about how it worked. He works at the refinery washing out tanks, it is very dangerous job but it pays well. A long time ago, when I was little, when some of the refinery tanks exploded, my friend's father was almost killed. He lived, but lost his face. After, he sounded the same, he laughed the same, his hands and his clothes and his size was the same, but his face was a skull wall with putty scraped on to it. Because he couldn't close his mouth all the way, he always looked like he was smiling. When I first saw him after the accident, I was scared of him, and when I told my friend she got mad at me and told me that he wasn't scary and that they were rich now because of the money the refinery company gave them. I don't think he is scary now, but sometimes
when I see him in town with his wife, who was the Prairie Port queen a long
time ago and very pretty, I am startled. I wonder if she can still see his face past
all those pale and rough scars. I worry sometimes, about King, when I see the
big red flare tower burning from the refinery, or when the smell is so bad even I
have a hard time breathing. I don’t know what I would do if there was another
explosion and King was in it, I can’t imagine him dead, or with no face or hands
or even lots of bandages, in the hospital. He loves to tell me about the refinery
does. How Eldorado really is a city of gold, just not the yellow kind. He talks
about Coronado discovering this part of the world hundred of years ago and
naming this place a city of gold without realizing how right he was. He talks
something about his vision and about destiny and that makes it even harder for
me to see the palaces he talks about here. He tells me about the explosion again
and again and tells me to listen, as if I wasn’t there or wasn’t there with him. It
is important to him. I asked him once if he liked working at the refinery and he
said that it wasn’t a matter of liking or not liking it but being able to hear
carefully what he needed to understand. I don’t ever get it, but I am always with
him when he want me too. I think I would be in love with him if it was
possible at all.
Raw oil from the earth cannot be used for energy until it is refined into petroleum and its products. This process requires, simply, intense and constant heat, filters, and holding tanks to contain the various stages of refined oil. Refinery workers maintain and monitor the mostly automated process, but there is a certain amount of hard labor involved when the metal tanks must be washed out with chemicals, water, and human power. A single spark of static electricity that builds up in the partially empty stainless steel tanks can ignite residual fumes and start a series of violent explosions until the flames can be smothered--like a god-sized kitchen grease fire. The refinement of oil, besides producing gasoline, motor oil, kerosene, lubricants, plastic materials, and cleaning solvents, also produces huge amounts of waste. The petroleum by-products resemble, in texture and color, a rich viscous mud. This toxic sludge is produced at a rate that exceeds the availability of safe disposal sites, so it is often deposited in vacant lots, stagnant ponds, and small creeks to stand until it is covered with dirt or sod. These sludge ponds and fields are often found in the same towns where the refinery chugs and smokes, near everyplace people are working, living, and playing.
I am laying outside of town in a field with King. The stars are everywhere. For once he is quiet. I can feel my body sliding down the curve of the round earth and if I raise my arms over my head I think I could gather the momentum I need and sled so fast across the grass I would make a hissing noise and when I opened my eyes when it was all over it would be day and the sun would be shining where I was—the other side of the world. I try to speak telepathically with King, a skill he has told me about. I tell him something simple first, that I see the Big Dipper, to see if he’ll point it out. I try something simple but harder for me; I tell him that I love him but my mind blocks it with black walls before it could reach him. He hasn’t even looked my way though, even though I know he isn’t sleeping. I try to sleep myself, to see what it is like to sleep outside, under the stars. With my eyes closed, I can definitely feel the curving earth, and that it is spinning. The tighter I close my eyes the more it revolves, not exactly around, but dipping on the upswing. I dip down and almost fall but the ground catches me again as we go around. I forget he is even there and spin away, counting the stars as they burn and scratch the surface of my exposed skin.
Dot looks at the miniature refinery and wonders why King is so fascinated by it. She looks at him, his hair falling over his flaming eyes, his huge hands laced behind his neck, elbows skyward. She doesn’t want to move, give away herself in some kind of idle movement, attract his attention in a way that would compel him to start telling more stories. Most of them she has heard over and over again, but he tells them each time like they are brand-new, or like he has been away and come back raw with new truths that won’t survive without being told. She only wanted to get back into the car, go to Sonic maybe and get a cherry limeade. She has been asking him for weeks to come with her to a few places and help her fill out applications for a job. He was very good at that kind of thing, the kind of thing that would intimidate her. She used to work for her aunt at her hair salon: taking appointments, sweeping hair, doing the laundry, small tasks, but her aunt had got a new job and now only cuts hair on the weekends at a friend’s salon. King wanted to spend his days off differently, though. They had gone to the Eldorado Oil Museum three times in a few weeks; that’s where they were now. Dot is watching King watch the model.
He has told her about so many things. He has told her that many times when you see what looks like a large glen of trees, even a forest, it is sometimes just a single tree, with one root system, a giant tree that changes colors in the fall all together, that loses its leaves all together, and greens up in the spring at the same time. She has thought about this one a lot, tried to feel the single consciousness of trees all together. He has pointed out different constellations to her, and in high school, helped her figure out things like math and grammar and poetry. Sometimes he shows her the bible and talks about the kings and miracles. He knows more she thinks, about what has happened in the town, and he has had long, long conversations with his grandmother, who he lives with, and her father, who has also lived in Eldorado his whole life. She doesn't understand this, but always listens, and sometimes catches herself telling people she knows what he has told her. Sometimes, she gets very tired always listening to him, and wishes she had something to tell him other than what she never can.

Even though she is being as quiet as possible, he still tells her about Mitch. She is surprised to find out that her dad told him this story, since she had never heard of it.

"A little boy, over thirty years ago and from this city, was playing by himself on an oil pump,' he said. "His name was Mitch."

I have told you about the pumps, about how they pull oil from the ground, how the counterweight works to force up the raw oil from a table deep inside the ground, how they never stop and how they look like grasshoppers or
strange people grinding against the ground. Mitch was playing on one of these
giant grasshoppers, climbing and imagining alone.

Maybe he slipped a little, or maybe he was playing risk games with his
own courage, but his hand caught beneath one of the counterweights and was
crushed. No one knows how long he was alone like that, bleeding and in pain.
And no one knows how your father's cousin found him, but he did; he found
him alone and bleeding on the pump. Your father’s cousin drove him to the
hospital, holding his hand hard under his thighs to stop the bleeding."

King looks at me sadly, and I hope that Mitch was saved by my dad’s
cousin. But I know that blood must have been everywhere, and that Mitch was
just a little boy.

"He might have lived except that he contracted tetanus from the oily
metal of the pump and died. You know the ballfield, the refinery gave those
parents that field, for they had grieved and grieved and grieved."

I learned something from King today. I was asking him about poetry again and
he showed me something from the bible, Psalms. You say it salms. He says they
are songs, but they don't have music, I said. He said that the words are like
music and that they sing in your head, or when someone speaks them aloud. I
think that I can do this, can write these songs, music that is words. I will try it
here:

his hands are like hands for a piano
that is all I have for now. I can hear my parents laughing upstairs and I want to see what it is.
Explosion, I.

Her mother told her recently, when they were talking about gardening, that she never felt right about feeding her food from the garden she grew in Eldorado. She said that it always took so long to grow, that it sometimes was the wrong color, or too small, and sometimes there was an unidentifiable fine dust over the fruits. She said she had hated living there, that the smell clung to her hair and clothes, and that sometimes she got strange headaches, or would get unexplainably sick.

Heavy metals floating in the air, more by-products from oil refinement, invade vulnerable soft tissue cells—especially those easily accessible through olfactory receptors in the nose near the brain. Eldorado’s refinery is as big and productive as those in heavy industrial areas in the East, with less zoning restrictions than those bigger, older cities. This combination has led to the highest per capita incidence of brain cancer in all of North America. Her dad has said that Eldorado never seems to green up as soon as other places in the spring.

She went to Skelly Elementary School. At the time, the refinery was owned by Skelly Petroleum. Most of the parents of the kids in her classes worked at the refinery, or had worked at the refinery. On the playground, the
children would play "explosion" and mimic bodies flying out of an exploding holding tank during a routine wash-out. The first action upon being released for recess was to smell the air and determine exactly how bad it smelled. On bad days, days that looked overcast but held no humidity, they would run in circles on the blacktop singing "PEEEUW! PEEEUW!" and asking each other who farted. There was a teacher who used to wear a surgical mask when she went outside. They made fun of her as much as they could without getting into trouble.

Her dad can drive through Eldorado and point out all the places that were waste dumps and sludge ponds and are now lots where community college buildings, businesses, new subdivisions, and parks are built. He can explain how dirt and gravel is added to the waste until a surface, sturdy enough for zoning, is created. Sod is rolled over the surface to cover the new, dark soil. He remembers acres of steaming sludge where nothing grew around them for acres before it all was covered and supported the foundations of her elementary school.
I had just put the picture on the refrigerator, smoothing my hands across it to feel the tackiness of the thick crayon marks. It was the Flint Hills again, and even though her mother had tried to encourage her to draw something else, I was glad, secretly, that she drew the hills over and over. It was something I felt as though I had shared with her that had made real impact; it was the part of her that was me. This picture made it so the fridge was completely covered, without a space left. There were the hills in green, in brown, in white, depending on the season she wanted. Some had cattle, small smudges in the distance. Many had the wire and post fences that chased each other down the edge of the turnpike. But they were all the hills.

I felt it from the soles of my feet before I realized what was happening. It felt like standing on an old floor over an old-fashioned boiler-type furnace that was slowing kicking on—a sloppy vibration. Then there was just the noise I couldn't hear but rearranged every cell in my body, and I was on the floor. You would think I would remember the noise but I didn't realize how loud it must've been until I suddenly got my hearing back hours later. There was a kitchen window that you could see the refinery from, and I steadied my way to it, through the soundings, until I saw the flames. I found her in the bedroom
curled on the floor, holding a hair ribbon she must have been getting from her
dresser and I just grabbed her and ran with her, my body hunched over her tiny
one, and we rode out on the turnpike with others, through the hills, until my
bones returned to their regular frequency. She stopped talking for a while after
that, and the next picture I hung was burned down, a little, all around the edges.
King looked over at me, where I was next to him, laying in the grass. He asked me if I remembered what had happened that last time there were explosions at the refinery.

"I was really little," I said. "I just mostly remember the noise and that we left in a hurry because we were so close by."

"You didn't speak for days after, and the sound was so loud it was unable to be heard. Your voice left with that sound."

I said I didn't remember that and that I wasn't in the mood for talking. I said that I thought we had come out here to look at the stars. I said that we had been lucky, anyway, not to have had a fire started from flaming debris sinking into the roof, or to have had someone close to us hurt.

"Your father ran with you through the hills," he said, "and he didn't realize there had been a sound until he realized he could not hear."

I told him that I didn't remember, that it was a long time ago, and that I wished we could be quiet.

*his hands are like hands for a piano*

*singing to a city of gold.*
You are standing on a Main Street. It is the regular kind of Main Street with two lanes of traffic heading their opposite, slow ways with slow men and women in Sunday cars and fast boys and girls in hand-me-down hatchbacks and lemons. There is everything you expect, a drugstore and a Penny’s, a place that sells washers and dryers and stoves, a man with a small office selling insurance. From above it moves a little slower and it is a little smeared over with shivering fumes from an industry that sees everything you do from the tops of white tanks and blazing flares. A little higher and the street and the building and houses creeping out fuzz some more, and then an immense noise races you up, impossibly high, and you can only see hills, everywhere, and a tower of black smoke charging from the middle. You can't stop rising and the hills smooth out to a rough weave with a single burning hole. They are a wide, brown, arcing line now, and you could almost reach down and feel the texture, there is a thickening in the middle of the arc, like a small smudge on an X-ray the doctor tells you is cancer.
Vision

We are leaving the Oil Museum and he says, “imagine the hills like the bottom of an ocean.” I imagine the lake in North Eldorado, man made with a dead forest of trees standing up through the water.

“No,” he says, “bigger and vaster, moving and tiding across everything you can see and further from the turnpike.” It is almost there now.

“This ocean,” he says, “is before Coronado, before he foresaw the City of Gold, when this future city is under the weight of this ocean.” I can see Eldorado wavering underneath the water, the refinery flares sputtering and smoking from the water and he says, “no it is only foreseen.” And then the noise in my heart slows down, the waves slow the sound waves to something I can hear and it sounds like the rushing in a perfectly quiet room or a far off ring that you might be imagining. The hills sink to the bottom of my stomach and the water moves in and I float, like a sliver of something shining or a single thread-knot of light.

It is so dark and I float forever through the dark. There is no end to it and I try to reach out but the noise passes through me and keeps me small. Soon I can see King and he can reach for me, and when he does, the water starts washing over itself, faster and faster until I can feel the edges of the hills
pressing into me and we are standing in the middle of them, only partially covered by water, and heat and green. The noise is a still buzz now, and I can smell things dying and growing all at once and then the hills, hard and groaning wash over the greenness and we are floating again, slowing, the noise a waiting beat. He says, "it is the gold," and we are pushed up in an explosion over the dry, brown lines of the hills, the light on our faces like gold, and I can see, in the distance over a familiar hill with no turnpike cutting around it, a glittering man on a horse with palaces in his eyes.

Underneath the frozen brown ocean the oil pushes through and fills the white tanks and then the fires start and the air blocks my noise with rolling balls of lead. The sun is hot on my face again and King lets go of me. He says, "Babe has cancer."
Explorers

Coronado di Francisco watched the old woman through the glass. She was sleeping in front of the television, and the blue light made her look much younger. Coronado had been watching her for a few months now, creeping along the edge of her activities, following her to work on his horse. He was not used to it, still, for as long as he had been doing this.

He can remember Nueva Galicia, Beatriz, his brother, who was a governor too. He thinks about them, the men and women close to him, the slaves, the heat of New Spain with its white suns and dust. He thinks about them when his nights are like this one, cold, crouching beneath a dying woman’s window, soothing his horse to keep him quiet. What he cannot remember is those few years as a reckless man, in his thirties, the one thousand men behind him like blind fools with their eyes squinted toward blazing golden horizons. The Seven Cities of Cibola blazed up from the distance like golden calves on painted hills, false, vulnerable. When he pressed his hands against his eyes he could see his men crumbling the adobe mortar that they thought was gold through unhopeful fingers. He could see accusing eyes. He could see his fingers on his own hands striking down the masons who built what he and his brother thought were cities of gold.
He was not used to this work still, the waiting and the watching. Keeping his horse quiet and feeling the dirt grind into his knees. Remembering when he closed his eyes, Mendoza and Beatriz, Cibola, the Zunis. He had not even come to this place when he was alive. He had not named it. He was not used to this work still and the old woman through the window was dying but not by his hands and fingers; she looked younger in the blue light and his horse was blustering to himself now. He couldn’t remember being so tired, so full of the old memories. He was lonely; he was compelled, still, to watch by the old woman in the window, to keep his horse quiet, to keep quiet the ghosts of thousands that still sought him over the hills through the gates of abandoned cities like this one.
His hands are like hands are like hands are like hands not used to the work the watching the remembering I saw him on the hill like gold faraway on the horizon after the ocean and the heat and the oil waiting underneath like another ocean I can’t stop remembering his hands and the singing or the lonely man on the hill with all those golden calves and black beaches of gold singing to a city of gold singing singing singing singing

I don’t want to hear his stories anymore, I don’t think he has anything else to tell me. I am starting to see what he sees and I still don’t believe in it. He told me that Babe has cancer and I didn’t know she was sick, didn’t know she was in trouble, but it has been in her brain for a long time without anyone knowing and he says the man on the hills is watching. I don’t know what to think anymore and I still love him as much as before. I want to write the psalm for him. I don’t want to hear him in my head anymore. I always wanted to know what he saw and now I don’t know. He says she will take her with him over the hills. He is not used to the work the watching the remembering. He says to start remembering more that this is going to be the beginning of everything. That there is going to be more but he is not used to the work to the watching and keeping his horse quiet underneath windows. I will try to keep listening and remember, I want to write a psalm for him that will tell everything, the beginning, everything.
Many millions of years ago what is now the great plains was a great ocean incredibly deep and incredibly wide. This ocean created the beginnings of what is now familiar topography for farmers, oil drillers, airplane pilots, pioneers and ancestors of pioneers. Life completely different than anything we have ever seen before teemed and evolved in this ocean until less and less water was needed and the ocean began to recede, cutting divisions into the land, leaving just enough water and heat for vast swamps and forests to thrive and support more life, life still completely different than anything we have ever seen before, and this life thrived and evolved and made its graves into the new land until the heat and wind took over more than the water ever did, and the hills and horizons covered everything, pressing into the graves and trees and former lives with a weight so intense something filled the pores of the rock, and earth below that waited for the release of drills and pumps and believers.
Mitch was tired of waiting for someone to play with, so with his mother's blessing, he went out to find something to do. It was springtime but the trees weren't even close to green yet. All the warmer whether meant is that the smell in the air felt much closer than usual, less a presence on a breeze and more a cloying partner. Mitch didn't notice as much as his mother did, who had all the windows in the house shut against it, which only made their tiny house hotter. So he left looking for something interesting, all by himself, because his brothers and cousins were too old to play with him anymore.

He didn't really have a destination in mind, but one way or another, he always ended up at the pumps which could be climbed on and investigated without anyone to compete with or bother him, since they were set far enough off the road. They looked like huge bugs to Mitch, like the ones in the movies at the Saturday matinees and it was easy to pretend that he was a famous scientist, or an army man, sent by the president to stop their takeover of the rest of the world. When he first approached the pump, he thought he saw a man standing there, slightly apart from the derrick, but it must have been a trick of the sun, because when he reached the squealing pump, no one was there.
They made so much noise it was easy to just imagine. He climbed around for awhile on the lower base, but he soon got brave enough to go a little higher and watch the weights move the head close and then away from the ground. He always wanted to find a way to sit on the greasy bar that supported the head and attached to the rotating weights at the back, but he wasn’t big or brave enough to do so. He could get right under and around the weights, and they were fascinating to watch—slow but not slow swinging around and around, splattering just a little sweet-smelling grease. He climbed from one side to the other, watching these weights; he tried to place his hands underneath one of them, just for a second, enough to get his heart pounding.

He started timing the space between when the weight rose up and when it clamped back against the base, and it was longer than he thought. He played the game with his hands a few more times, and then made himself keep his hand in machine half as long as the whole time it was safe to do so. In his own world of timing and counting and noise and heartbeats, he placed his hand into the pump again and again, breathing in time to the pump, holding his hand to his chest when it emerged whole. There was nothing but his hand, the beats, the noise and all his thoughts on the weights and absence of weights. He didn’t smell the hard smell of the refinery in spring, notice the increasing heat of the afternoon, or the feel and placement of his own body except for his hand—in and out, in and out. He didn’t feel anything but the rushing breath that made his own counting, and then, not even that as his mind took over that constant metronome. He didn’t feel anything but the noise of the pump and the pump
of his own forearm and elbow and the locking as his crouching limbs became part of the machine. He didn't feel anything but the naturalness of his back foot slipping in time to the pump, the natural lowering of his body into the machine, the counting backwards as his hips moved backwards and the machine claimed him slip by counted slip, like it should, and when the weight came down on his hand in perfect time, it seemed like some sort of completion, inevitable.

The blood or pain didn't come at first and his hand looked flat, like the cartoon characters got it with a sledgehammer. It just beaded a little by little taking over one grouping of pores at a time. He thought that he hadn't even jerked his hand away, but removed it slowly, keeping in mind the timing of the pump. He started to wipe the blood away with his shirt, so he could watch it rise, but it was starting to come a little faster than he could keep up with it. Suddenly the pump was unbearably loud and the sun hotter than he remembered, and the world had a ghostly white haze around it. He tried to climb down with one hand, but then couldn't remember how, and he was suddenly on the ground. His hand didn't look comical anymore but intimidating, the blood was everywhere, and somewhere that he couldn't quite name there was pain. He didn't know that his Babe, his aunt, had sent her son out to get him, that someone had seen him there playing as alone as he thought he was. His cousin loomed over him yelling things he didn't understand, and as they drove away, so fast, with his hand pressed hard under his cousin's jean-rough thigh, Billy saw the man again, and this time he was with a horse.
his hands are like hands for a piano

singing to a city of gold

the city and he wait in the hills under black clouds

where they have surfaced from under the oceans
Oil, III., Babe

I am trying to keep my head and body perfectly still, like they have asked me to, but it is so hard with the restraints and the noise. From behind the glass, the machine looked so quiet and smooth-running, but from here it is almost unbearably loud. I don't understand why they need another picture of my head, they know that it is there, even precisely where it is, nestled in the soft, quiet place of electric tissues where it is so dark they need these humming machines to look in at it. The pictures are beautiful, full color and swirling like rings of dye bleeding into an old sheet to made new again. But they always point out the smudge, that shows up in every picture from every angle, smug and comfortable. It is far enough away from any knife that might attempt to meet it, and I can only feel it in my dreams when it rubs against the memories and aromas and speech surrounding it. I am laying still for the machine again, the machine with its blind, smooth eyes that can see all my dreams and stir them into a deep, tight smudge on a slick, gorgeous picture.

It is spring and still, nothing has started to green yet. I think that spring has come even later than it ever has. I used to ask my husband about it, and he would shrug, greased, stained hands around a coffee mug from my restaurant. I have seen the dust, the strange dust that has gathered on the leaves of the
tomato plants, and when the air is bad it is impossible to shut a window against it; it is not the rich headiness of gasoline, or the sweetness of grease and oil, but a dry, acridity that burns and soaks into the softness of your stomach and eyes. I have gone for months without noticing, and then suddenly gone crazy with a need to block it out, to get at the air. I think about what this doctor has said about heavy metals, carcinogens, square-sounding things. I think about how the white tanks bordering the cemetery look like huge gravestones. I think away from the noise around me.

King has started to walk around the house at night, talking more to himself then usual. I have been asked how I deal with him, how I have him in my house without wondering what is so wrong with him. I have already raised so many sons and daughters and sons and daughters of people that I have loved, that I say I do not notice him, he is less trouble than the ones who have done crazy things, who have done crazy things all the way to the cemetery by the white tanks that look like gravestones. He does nothing more than talk, less than any of the children in my house ever have, and the talk breaks the quiet and cuts through the smell sometimes. He is strange, with his big hands and deep eyes, but he doesn’t do anything but work and talk. I am the only parent he remembers very well, and so he takes care of me. He says I will be taken care of, and to prepare, and explains everything else to himself on his patrols around the house at night. He says he knows what is coming, and I imagine he does; I am certain I do, too, and I can only prepare by the waiting, and I do not mind agreeing to the machines and magic pictures in the meantime.
It is the same as usual, gleaming a little in its darkness. The doctor frowns and explains, prepares me with appointments and symptoms and schedules. I think about the roundness of my cells and their willingness to change, their eventual welcoming of the square explorers. They have taken them in as their own. I think I have always hated this place, despite who I love here, but I can't be angry that it has finally taken me over. This doctor has said class-action suit and habitable conditions and citizen expectations, but I am the one who stayed here past love and grief past all the normal motions. I am not unfamiliar with the visitor nesting inside my skull, I have invited him in like anyone else who haunts outside the door long enough.
The dream the dream the dream. The same, the noise but not noise, the heat from the flames, the my house but not my house, King in Babe's quilt fragile and thin and knowing. I called the oil museum today and I asked them, I said, can someone tell me about it what I think happened, something real about my dream. The woman didn't remember and wanted the exact date said no one there had the time to look through all the newspapers for the dream. I asked if she remembered the heat and the noise, the huge noise and she just got quiet, and didn't remember anything and said no one could look through all those newspapers with the date and the dream burned into them. I know, though, how easy it is to forget it is there, no matter how big it is, and how much the smell is, how it is braver to breath it in and think it familiar and point at the teacher with the mask—but I think it gets bigger all the time and has been making the air heavier and no one is noticing except the sliding cells eating up the air inside of us. King is like that air, inside my head like the heat and noise that no one remembers.

More and more I see him, the sun shining off of him from across the street or around a corner. He walks so slow and King says he is El Hombre Dorado, the gilded man. He says he sees him in the dark keeping watch over Babe and what King says about this scares me. I have seen him at the gates of
the refinery and a haze surrounds him and the smell goes deeper than it ever has before. King says remember my dream remember my dream but I am not used to it still.
City of Gold

The name Eldorado is a contraction of Spanish for The Gilded Man, El Hombre Dorado. In 1857, Captain J. Cracklin, with a few settlers from Lawrence, Kansas, arrived at a place on the Walnut River to the south of where Eldorado actually began serious development after the Civil War. Coronado di Francisco, a governor in 16th century Mexico and a legendary seeker of the seven cities of gold, did not, as many residents believe, land near the site of Eldorado and dub it a city of gold. In fact, Coronado was looking for Quivira, the place a lying Zuni guide told him contained vast riches. Coronado had already massacred thousands of Zuni in his search for golden cities, and this guide, chosen to lead Coronado far away from the southwest, was also killed, when Coronado discovered the guide's lie. Coronado never made it to Quivira, but he got as far as a place on the high plains near Linsborg, known as Coronado Heights. The prairie must have looked gold as the sun struck against it, but Coronado had been fooled by the same effect of light on Zuni pueblo buildings.

Eldorado might have looked gold in the right kind of light before the Wichita Natural Gas company, in 1915, started drilling on John Stapleton's farm north of town. The earth gave at six hundred and seventy feet and the refineries rose from it as men like Bill Skelly, Jack Vickers, and Al Derby
marched through a town that had recently gained close to twenty thousand new people. At the right place at the right time, Eldorado was ready to export oil to the Allies in Europe, and natives like to claim that the Allies floated to victory on a sea of Eldorado oil.

Oil comes from microscopic living organisms which lived in hot oceans tens of millions of years ago. Bodies piled at the bottom seas and swamps and were gradually buried by soil and rocks. The trapped organic material, under enormous pressure, changes into the hydrocarbons oil and gas. In refinement of the crude oil, usable materials are separated from wastes containing ammonia, phenols, sulfides, cyanides, thicynates, and suspended heavy metals that contribute to the particular living environments in towns surrounding these refineries. Oil is the main source of energy in the world. Oil that is not used for energy, about twelve percent, is converted in chemical products and plastic materials.

Eldorado is a city of gold. It does not shine like a glided city might, like a city Coronado was seeking. It does rise from the prairie noticeably, in orange flares and colored smokes, and money clogs the Walnut River like fallen trees. The natives who believe in Coronado make him a better explorer than his was, fasten him with gold leaf capes instead of failure and ridicule. Every breath is crammed with wealth and discovery, every chance glimpse of place monies the cells like memories, thick, black, seeping.
Doubt

I turn away from him and the stars, I feel like I need a moment to myself. It scares me sometimes, how he can get into my mind, I take a deep breath in and he is there. I am so tired of the dream and of trying to remember; he says ask your father about these things, that he knows, but there isn’t anything I believe dad can tell me that I need to know. I understand King less and less and less and sometimes I don’t want to hear about the stars and trees and all the oil, but it’s like something inside of him just won’t stop. He likes to talk about his job at the refinery about how the water and air are sifted, like silt away from the crude oil. He says that it’s the heat that releases the oil until its finer and finer, pure enough to drink, to rub into the skin, to slip like silk between the fingers. He talks about the men like they are warriors, about the noise of the flares burning off fumes, and he I think he would talk about the smell, but I don’t think he can smell it anymore. He says the oil is trapped under the ground, under Eldorado, in secret pockets under six hundred feet of rock where it has been waiting for millions of years. He says those men and him, in rubber-soled shoes, find the gold in the heaviness of that old ocean and swamp, in those white tanks filled to the brim with millions and millions of years worth of graves.
I thought he took me here to tell me about Babe, about what was wrong with her and if she would get better. She is old, but my dad says she is not that old as he shakes his head from side to side. Everyone has always liked Babe, and she has taken care of King for as long as anyone could remember, since the heat and the noise, and dad says she has done as good as job as anyone. She runs a restaurant in town, but it has been closed a lot lately, Babe has been at Susan B. Anthony hospital a lot. But King doesn’t talk about her, but he talks about everything else and doesn’t let me get any words in edgewise. While he is talking about oil, I think about Babe and wonder about cancer. I hope that it doesn’t hurt, and that Babe isn’t too scared. I know, from dad, that the cancer is just one tumor, in her brain, and I wonder if when Babe closes her eyes she can see it, as a thought in her mind. I also know, from dad, that they can’t operate but they are trying other things to get rid of it. How can they get it to leave? Would it leave an empty space behind? It has been there some time, dad says, so why does it have to leave now and what will it do? I guess it would get bigger until Babe could think of nothing else but the tumor, like the way King gets into my mind and becomes one, big thought, crowding the inside edges of my skull. What are we if we are just one thought? I am afraid because King is too easy to allow to grow in my brain like Babe’s tumor and they have nothing at Susan B. to make him leave. Suddenly, he says,

“You must stop wondering about her; she is preparing to move on.”

“Move on? Where is she going?”
“You have seen before who she will go with, she is being watched over and she chosen, just like I have seen before.”

“I don’t understand, I don’t understand. She is sick, so where is she going? Isn’t she at home now, and is she okay? I thought they were going to try other things to make her cancer go away, how is she doing, you haven’t said at all.”

And then he just turned away from me and I was lost. I knew he believed I should have understood him. He didn’t talk to me the rest of the night and it was the biggest quiet I have ever heard. It was as if something very loud had happened that took away all of my hearing.
His hands are like hands for a piano
Singing to a city of gold
The city and he wait in the hills under black clouds
Where they have surfaced from under the oceans
Oceans that covered them millions and millions of years
Ago until they rested as black graves under the earth.
He has seen all of this before you mourned a city that had already fallen.

I don’t believe that this is really like a song or even a song-prayer. But he has seen the first part of it and he says that I should keep going and that it is not finished. I want him to tell me what should be in it, and I want there to be names if this is going to be like it is for real. I don’t think I could get more tired than I am of all the stories and his asking and asking. He tells me to describe the man that is here. I am not sure who he means. He says it is the man I have seen before when he has told me about the oceans and the town and that it is the man who will take Babe with him. A man who has been here a long long time, who came here before anyone. I always ask him if it is someone we know and he says he is more like someone we will all meet, and when he says this, it breaks the spell for me, it doesn’t sound serious at all. I am tired of the disappearing and reappearing of King in my mind. I think, sometimes, all those fumes have got to him, that he talks crazy.
The Gilded Man

Her hands, by her head on the pillow, are curled together, like they are cupping some small treasure. It occurs to him for the millionth and millionth time, that he does not belong here, doing this work, watching over these hurt people. He sees the mass in her head, through her skin and soft hair and bones, and it is thriving, and silent. Dreams race around it like satellites in a chemical orbit, and he thinks that he knows about dreams. That his have never stopped spinning long enough for him to rest. He has watched this woman long enough and he is tired. He wakes her up with a soft palm to her face.
From very high above it is exactly like a place that anyone could have anyone in. It is the town off a turnpike in the wide ocean of the midwest filled with grandmothers and great aunts and cousins and brothers and sisters-in-law. You know someone there from your mother’s or father’s side and it is your mother or father that keeps track of those men and women, when they marry, when they have children, when they die. You have gotten phone calls, on Sunday afternoons, weeks after the funeral, that mention one of these men or women’s death, and you place only an old face or a single item in their home that fascinated you as a child. But there was a funeral, and you don’t even imagine who would have been there, but you can look below and there are many people there, people who have never touched your life but who are mourning by a raw grave wounded into the ground next to other stones that ride against fences keeping back the white tanks filled with millions and millions of graves.

This is all from above and you are not connected to it, but there are people around the already scarring grave that are throwing large sheets of their lives into the dirt after an old body sealed warmly in lead and satin. The sheets are maps that have directions to places that were once occupied by different
versions of the grieved, the sheets are torn from catalogs of things that the
grieved has held or cared for, the sheets are lived schedules of minutes and
hours and days and weeks and even years that the grieved made with those who
are grieving. These wide, stiff, invisible sheets float through the air after the
grave, bursting into flames at the last moments and sifting as ashes into a
darkness. So much is buried, one grave can’t contain it, and from the earth rises
a column of smoke that touches you, and tears up your eyes for its harshness.
What A Witness Remembers

We didn’t return to the house for a long time, just watched Eldorado burn from a distance, on the television at my wife’s parent’s house. The flames were huge, burning all the hot colors a fireplace does when you throw in the Sunday funnies. At one point they were filming from what looked like between our home and Babe’s, and I suddenly remembered Babe and hoped one of her kids had taken care of her, or that she had gotten out herself. I stopped worrying when I saw that our neighborhood had been evacuated anyway, that the police had gone knocking on doors and escorting people away. Later, when we came back, there was police tape around the house. I can remember thinking that I couldn’t believe it was really safe now, the smoke and the smell were thicker than when we left, only the noise was gone, there didn’t seem to be any air in town left to breathe. The refinery itself looked like another planet—it was filled with men in protective suits, charred ground, metal twisted on itself. It was about this time that we started hearing who was hurt, worse. A friend of ours was in a burn unit in Wichita. Something horrible had happened to Babe. I was just so glad the house was okay.

We spent the night in Wichita. Since the explosion, Dot hadn’t said a word or done really anything at all. I was worried, she was just so quiet, but my
father-in-law, who was a doctor insisted it was nothing to worry about, that she was just a little kid who had gotten a big scare. I wasn’t as sure, she wasn’t like other kids anyway, always a little too wrapped up in her own world, her kindergarten teacher had even suggested she might be a bit slow. My wife agreed with her dad though, and Dot was just bundled up on the couch with the idea she would snap out of it by morning. She didn’t though, not for a long, long time.
I just got back from Babe's funeral. It was so sad, everyone quiet or crying to themselves. I was angry too, because I didn't know Babe was going to die, or if she was, that it was going to be so soon. King had never talked about Babe and her cancer with me, not in real ways, or ways I could understand. Late one night last week King called our house and said he had just called an ambulance, that he had found Babe in her bed. Everyone talked about what a blessing it was, that she hadn't suffered very much, that the treatments she had started had never gotten a real chance to make her very sick. Dad thought it was a blessing too, he talked about a man he knew who worked at the refinery who had caught something like Babe and how he was in the hospital for months, dying and in pain. I wasn't prepared for it though. I know I will really miss her. She was always so nice to me when I went over to King's, or ate at the restaurant, she didn't treat me any different from anyone else. At the funeral, King was so quiet, and he didn't stand with everyone else at the funeral. Instead, he stood near the cyclone fencing that marked off where the refinery starts and looked out in the distance. I never saw him cry, not once, even though everyone else did. He didn't talk to me afterwards either, and I still haven't seen or talked to him since.
Babe should have been at the restaurant, but she was at home when it happened. She had to make blue cheese dressing, but realized too late that she didn’t have any mayo and had to go home to her storeroom to get a commercial-sized jar before the Saturday night dinner rush. She had been pulling the heavy jar from a top shelf when she was suddenly on the floor, her hand and arm cut by broken glass and mayonnaise all over everything. She thought she had just finally fallen off the rickety stepladder she used in the storeroom but then she felt vibrations and smelled something acrid and wrong. She got up and ran to the kitchen window with half of her heart choking her throat and saw the flames, realized she had slammed the storeroom door and had not heard it, the noise from the explosion had deafened her. She had to drive to find out something to replace the worst news of her life.

Susan B. Anthony was a mess. She walked into the emergency room entrance, looking through and past men in hastily pulled on working clothes and rubber shoes covered in blackness, bright white nurses racing in between them. A nurse walked up to her, put her arm around her back, saying something and guiding her somewhere, she went with her until she realized the nurse thought she was here for her arm, which had bled all over her white
apron. She tried to tell her that she wasn’t there for her arm, that it wasn’t that badly hurt, but she couldn’t hear herself talk or the nurse’s response. She pulled away from the nurse and said that she needed to know if her son was here, IF HER SON WAS HERE. The nurse understood, then, and directed her to the admitting desk where in a slow ringing wave, Babe started to get her hearing back. While she was in line, the nurse who had brought her to the desk stopped beside her again with a white length of gauze. “You should really have that checked out,” she said, from very far away.

She didn’t suppose that the emergency room here was ever this busy. Eldorado was only barely medium sized, and the hospital would only ever have to service the very old and sick and the occasional accident or heart attack. Babe realized that many of the men here were like her, ignoring minor injuries to get word on others who they had taken in or on those they suspected or knew had been taken in. All she knew was that she had one son left, that he put on work clothes and rubber-soled boots every morning, and that there had been a noise so loud that she didn’t hear it. It was her turn and she gave her name and her son’s name. The admitting nurse shook her head and suggested that she try the refinery.

Babe drove back to her neighborhood only to find out that it had been evacuated, her backyard neighbors with the little girl who sometimes plays with her grandson must have left because their truck was gone. She drove back into town to the restaurant to use the phone there and found several of her regular customers waiting outside to come in, use the phone, sit back from the chaos.
She let everyone in and started coffee and went to the back to use the office phone. The line was busy for a long, long time and when she finally got through, the woman who answered the phone said she didn’t have complete information, only that her son was working that day, but that it happened in a area of the refinery that didn’t typically have a lot of people around.

She was told to try again soon when there would be more information, so she went back up from to see if any of the regulars knew anything. None of them had family or friends working the shift, so the group could only speculate on what might have happened. While they talked about static electricity and fumes, the telephone rang. Babe let it ring so long before she answered that her patrons got quiet, watching her to see what she would do. She picked it up in the middle of a ring and it was the woman from the refinery. He had died instantly, he had died even before she ran to the kitchen window and saw the towers of hot orange flames. He had died, because of the way sound travels, even before she didn’t hear a noise so loud it knocked her to the ground like a hand from nowhere.
His hands are like hands for a piano
Singing to a city of gold
The city and he wait in the hills under black clouds
Where they have surfaced from under the oceans
Oceans that covered them millions and millions of years
Ago until they rested as black graves under the earth.
He has seen all of this before you mourned a city that had already fallen.
His father had been taken and his father's mother and the rest of his mother's
Sons in the fires burning from this city fire towering and hot with a sound
Like nothing so loud it takes all sound away. The people in this city are
dreaming, dreaming of the fires rising from the center of this place, dreaming,
Dreaming of a man with dreams of his own who comes with every fire and
walks among the people in this city talking to no one, making himself known to
No one but a man with hands for piano and dreams no one can yet imagine.
Coronado watched King from a distance, being careful to stay out of his line of vision and keep his horse quiet because King could see things that the others couldn't and because Coronado didn't have anything to say to King, wasn't sure if he ever would. King was helping with a routine tank wash-out, helping the other men in their workclothes and rubber-soled boots. He could see the smell like heat rising from the ground and it looked to have a weight significant enough that the men should be walking on it and not through it. The tank was huge and white when taken in all at once, but this close the grayness could be seen, and the black sludge and sealing tars bleeding from its invisible pours. The men couldn't, but Coronado could see bright fuzzes of electricity, like tiny puffs of light chasing each other, now building up, compacting, turning sharp crackling blue, now instantly disappearing and starting again. They gathered against the walls and boulders of the smell, maniacally, but would slide off, seemingly disinterestedly. Coronado watched all this carefully, watched King working and looking around him just as carefully, like he was seeing it too. Coronado watched all of this until he got tired of standing still and hiding and his horse was breathing impatiently.
Riding away, Coronado looked back occasionally at the refinery, smoking, dark despite the tank’s whiteness, smelling and creeping. It was certainly less hard to mistake than sunny pueblos in the right light. Nothing took on even the slightest hint of gild, no matter how far Coronado rode. There were no spires or domes baking with sun, there were no jeweled window casings and flagpoles glinting. There was no shine from pewter pavements and hammered gold gates. He turned away for the last time and felt more lost than he ever had. He was never supposed to have been here, had left this whole state, from further west, and gone back home. He died at home, but opened his eyes into another world that found him riding through streets less deceptive in their look of gold than a dull lead box. He did not see the palace here that King seemed to. He did not have that vision, but was lost here anyway, taking people away that suffered. He was tired of trying to find the city of gold here. He was never more certain than of how, exactly, he had wasted his life while he had it.
Accidents happen. There are workers who said that between September and February of the year furnaces and new steam systems were installed at the refinery that there was nothing but trouble. In October, for instance, on one of those days heavy with the kind of air begging to rain, on one of those days saturated with refinery and wet and unrelieved by even a tiny vein of air, a group of workers were told by the fire marshal not to continue welding repairs on a tank too full of product to risk a stray spark, a little too much heat. The oil tank needed insulated, with a two to three inch cover of tin before it could be fully operational.

This is a tank among many other tanks burning products off gold found six hundred and seventy feet in the ground under a whole city of gold. This is a tank among many tanks at a facility capable of handling over eighty-six thousand barrels of crude gold a day, of handling over thirteen thousand barrels of natural gas, twenty-four hours of steady, burning production. The fire marshal said no, that it wasn't worth risking a stray flame or lick of heat, but a foreman comes later and says do it, and eighty-six thousand barrels of gold shine and say do it and those men in rubber soled boots climb a dead tank and start sending orange and yellow and blue sparks into a heavy, foggy October day
during a year where there has been nothing but trouble. Inside the tank is kept warm to keep liquid and ready many many gallons of green money soaked in hot black gold, and accidents happen.

A worker whose unit was across from the tank says the top just blew off, just opened up the top of that tank like it was a tin can. But accidents happen, and those men on top of the tin can were as safe as overtime and hazard pay made them. Some orange and blue and yellow lick of heat burned away gallons and gallons of gold and made a mess of a tank among many and someone thinks he remembers that one of the men at least broke his back but is sure, sure he recovered and then that someone says, wasn’t that lucky? There are people who can’t be silent fast enough.

It had been nothing but trouble from September to October but the rubber-soled men clocked in every shift. Call this town and say, what happened? Call them whenever something has or something did. Say, I thought I remembered something terrible from a long time ago, but I want to know how it happened, want to find my place there. The voices will trade for different voices but they all will say that there are dates burned into margins that are too hard to find, that there are papers crumbling and that no one can reach them and that there is much trouble time and money for what you ask. Then say, but I just want one voice who thinks they remember, and they will be new and not know anyone, and will mention people who have already not talked to you.

One friend of a mother, father, aunt, grandmother, great aunt you knew will offer to talk to you about old times and describe something that doesn’t
meet what you have known to be true in your dreams and in the faces of your family. Some old gray words will snake around your cells like they might mean something, but blacker words will come behind them and cover. Again, no one from any history will have gotten hurt or gotten sick or gotten tired or gotten angry but everyone is lucky and glad and understanding and remembers your father and your mother and your grandmothers and grandfathers and remembers how they were back then more than they can remember accidents happen.

You might start to think that you are crazy, that it is like one of those dreams that you wake in the middle of the night crying from, your heart clogged between your bones and your tears hot as hot oil: dreams that you don’t remember as any kind of sadness in the morning when you pass your hands over swollen eyes. You can’t be crazy though, there are the graves, rocking into the ground in their stony ways, and there are scars and faces that you have seen opened and burned by heat and money. There are stories from those who got out and left town and got far enough away from a golden place where accidents happen to have the same dreams you do in the middle of the night when the silence is crowding past the ears like heavy October mornings.

Accidents happen, try to find the ground zero of them, try to hear the noises and the crying since and during. There had been nothing but trouble from September to February and does anybody remember a dark, short day in December when an accident happened that pushed away every last bit of air and remembrance in a gold city that sits on the prairie like a palace. No one works
around where it happened; that's what everyone says and it was Saturday and it was after Christmas and there was nobody to clog up Susan B. Anthony hospital but old people and very sick people. There was nothing but noise and flames thirty feet high and Toluene and Hexane and Heptane are non-toxic and they are nothing to worry about so don't clog up the hospitals and the roads around these towers of flames, there is nothing there to burn you, there is nothing there but noise.

Non-toxic gold runs through lines, all through refineries, and when there is constant movement, when there is one thing always running and moving against another there is also electricity. But everything gets grounded and the stray orange and yellow and blue electricity falls away, it gathers and pulses and dances invisibly but it then scatters and the men have controlled this, they have done this. But there was nothing but trouble between September and February so a few hot orange and yellow and blue sprites found a way to make accidents happen. They found a way to dance from the lines to dance with all that gold just lying around and feed a noise that no one could hear, but knocked people clear away from their homes and clogged streets around the refinery with the people who had been knocked away. No one heard, but they could see the thirty foot towers of orange and yellow and blue heat from miles and miles away, and they could hear from fathoms and fathoms deep and everyone could forget the burnings that lasted for two days that missed anyone because it was after Christmas and dark and no one worked where it happened anyway.
It was nothing but trouble from September to February when there were times no one was working, but there are those who will tell you how the overtime after the strikes were like gold. There are those that will tell you how lucky it was no one was injured or killed, how lucky it was no one worked where it happened, and sometimes you can find someone to go through the crumbling gray papers with their black black pictures and find statements from owners who flew in for the papers who said how lucky it was and how non-toxic. I know I have seen the scars and the graves but accidents happen and here they are lucky, especially when there was nothing but trouble from September to February.

There is something in the dreams of these mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers and great aunts and great uncles. They wake from these dreams from noises so loud no one can hear them, and they are haunted at grave sides and in secret anniversaries. There are those now who will tell you about letters, EPA and OSHA and how there will be no more trouble and about how the air is sweet now and how the roads are finally paved with gold, glittering and shining.
His hands are like hands for a piano
Singing to a city of gold
The city and he wait in the hills under black clouds
Where they have surfaced from under the oceans
Oceans that covered them millions and millions of years
Ago until they rested as black graves under the earth.
He has seen all of this before you mourned a city that had already fallen.
His father had been taken and his father's mother and the rest of his mother's
Sons in the fires burning from this city fire towering and hot with a sound
Like nothing so loud it takes all sound away. The people in this city are
dreaming, Dreaming of the fires rising from the center of this place, dreaming,
Dreaming of a man with dreams of his own who comes with every fire and
walks among the people in this city talking to no one, making himself known to
No one but a man with hands for piano and dreams no one can yet imagine.
This man has seen these dreams and it will be and is written what will happen
To the fathers and mothers and sons of daughters who are still there in the city
Of gold, the man knows the fire and the noise will come again and will not
leave Anything left, not even the haunted and the wandering. Those already
taken Were disregarded warnings of a time that has filled the streets since sun
has Broken across the prairies, after the oceans had drained and the deep green life Had been buried. The black evidence of graves has been trapped, waiting to Build something else that would burn upon itself. There have been other Prophets, this man is the very last of them and message will come with evidence.
When Prophets are Called

King was tired of being followed, and of waiting to be spoken to. He had almost been able to catch him, in his peripheral vision, so Coronado was closer than he had ever been before. It had been harder to make himself turn around, lately, to look before he was gone, he hadn’t expected Babe to be taken away so suddenly, even if it had been clear she would be leaving soon. Sometimes, when he was at work with the other men working on units and monitoring the products, he could feel how the heavy air was sparking and flashing; he could feel the air’s electric resistance when he moved through it, like it was a sea of heat and tiny thorns. The men he worked with had lost their shadows, even on the days when the sun was brightest, and around them he could see where the heat and flashes were gathered around their heads and arms like invisible burdens. He knew it was time to start to get his message down, to filter it through Dot, but it sat in his head like a headache sandwiched in his skull bones, making it difficult to act and to think. He had always known what she was there for and she had already begun to move with the message, he had seen what she has done, but she was also confusing him. There were things in her eyes and around inside her head that grabbed onto the heat of his skin and pulled him, there were things she didn’t want him to see that he almost could.
There were things that made him think that what he knew about destruction and heat and noise were wrong, that there could be things to know that had nothing to do with anything but the mild heat and sounds from arms surrounding you and a heart beating against your bones.
"You were very young," her father said closing his eyes a little, "and your mother was in Wichita visiting her parents while I was watching you here at the house. I don’t know what you were doing, but I found you on the floor of your bedroom, curled up and shaking, or maybe the house was still shaking. When I carried you outside, I could see the flames already, all orange and yellow and even blue, and we got into the truck to evacuate. It was strange, I almost got into a very bad accident with a police car, because I couldn’t hear the sirens, I realized that the blast had temporarily deafened me. We drove out of Eldorado to Wichita with hundreds of others, and even from the turnpike you could see the flames. I was worried about the house, and I was worried about you, you still hadn’t uncurled, and you were shaking. It was already dark when it all happened, and it was very surreal, we watched the rest of what happened on the television from your grandparent’s house. You were so quiet, and wouldn’t talk to anyone, which worried me more than anyone else. They said you would get over it by the next morning, but it was a long time until you talked to anyone again. What happened the next morning is that I heard the Babe’s son had been killed, how, exactly, no one was ever sure, but a few months later, his wife left town and that’s how Babe came to be responsible for King. I can still remember
that picture you drew, the one of the hills and all the big flames, the one that
had been burned around the edges."
Faith

Last night, King took me to the Oil Museum, which was closed. I could barely see him in the dark, there was one light from the porch of the museum which lit up one side of his body. We sat outside for what seemed like a long, long time and I thought that he had taken me there to talk about something but I couldn’t guess what it was. I wanted to tell him that I had asked my dad about the explosion in all my dreams, but that I still didn’t understand why he was in my dreams, and why we were grown up and not little kids, and why he was so sick in them. I didn’t feel like I could start talking though, and the silence was so loud and unbearable, not like other times we had been quiet together, under the stars.

I couldn’t think of what he wanted to talk about, if he wanted to talk at all, so I just sat and waited. What he said surprised me, he said, “Do you know about what happened to my father?” I was uncertain, I didn’t want to say the wrong thing, so I just shook my head. He looked at me for a minute and said, “he was killed at the refinery. He was killed in the same explosion that you dream about and that you asked your father about, the one that made you unable to talk for so long.” King looked away for a minute. I didn’t know why he was telling me this, why he was talking about this when he never had before.
"He was working in an area that not many people usually did at a time when there weren't very many people there. I can remember him leaving for work in his boots and work clothes, and not wanting him to go. It was almost dark, and his shifts were usually day shifts. We never knew why he had to go in, except that Babe told me, later, about the problems they had been having at the refinery, and that he might have been asked to go in and check on something.

He couldn't have been there very long, before the explosion. He couldn't have had much time to park his car, walk to the area, and look around. There were only a few other people there, who he wouldn't have had time to talk to, he couldn't have even clocked in. He couldn't have had any time, even right after it happened, to have realized that he was gone. Maybe he saw something from above, some flames, black smoke. I don't think he would've had time to see the man waiting for him, to know that he would be leaving. Even now, at the refinery, there is no exact record of him ever being there."

King looked at me after telling me this, looked at me in a way that made me feel like I should know what to do next, or what him telling me this meant. I had never heard him talk about his father, and had always assumed that he had been too young to really remember anything. He started talking again, this time about a man who was here in Eldorado, a man that King said was named Coronado and came for people here like his father and Mitch and his grandmother. I didn’t understand, and then King started telling me about searching for cities of gold, and people named Zuni and the oceans again. And then he said I had already been writing about this, that he had seen it, and I
thought about my Psalm that I write in my diary and didn’t understand at all, I just read it. He said didn’t I want names, and now he has given me some, and I was more confused than ever, more scared of how I was able to do what I had been doing. Then he put his arms around me, and it was like my heart stopped beating, and all I could feel was his hands, hot against my back.

“He has been here a long time,” he said in my ear, “and he is tired of taking people away and watching for more to come. He has been here waiting for me, waiting for someone to voice a message about Eldorado, which is a real city of gold. He watches me all time, but he hasn’t told me what to do, but he comes closer all the time and I know more and more what it is that I should do. I still need you to keep writing and to keep dreaming, and to not be afraid, you are part of it too. I am glad you know what happened that day, because it began us and what we should do.”

I heard him talking from a long ways away and it was hard to understand everything, he had always been around to explain things that I never understood before, but this was much harder, and part of me was frightened he was saying things that made no sense, made me feel like he was dangerous somehow. He tightened his arms around me and his breath was hot against my neck, and I felt like it would be impossible for me ever to move. Then he said, “I am a prophet, and there is much to be said. There he is now, and I will go with him.” King let go of me and then walked into the darkness where I couldn’t see anyone waiting for him. I realized he had said the last thing that made any sense to me so long ago I didn’t even remember when.
I can't do this I can't do this I can't so this I can't do this I just want everything to be like it was before. It seems like everything has happened and that everything should be over and why can't we just live our lives? Dad says he heard King has stopped going to work, he just walks around town talking to someone who isn't there.
Explosion, III.

It took two days to put out the fire because there wasn't enough blood. If you have ever worked in a kitchen, or in a restaurant, you know that you can't put water on a grease fire, that because oil and water don't mix, the water just spreads out the oil and makes the fire worse, it has to be smothered. How do you smother fire thirty feet in the air? Oxblood, in huge tanks on trucks can be forced through hoses with special nozzles that create a foam that can rob huge fires of the oxygen they need to burn. Eldorado wasn't ready for what happened the cold, dark, short day in December. There had been trouble for a few months, but this was the last thing anyone expected to happen, there wasn't enough blood to go around. The nearest ten thousand gallon reserve was not enough, and miles away. The first time they thought they put it out, after all the dark and cold and heat and flames they were left with black scorch and blacker smokes and white smoking tanks and, of course, all the steaming, blackish red. There was too much heat, though, and it started again. Like the time before, there wasn't enough blood, there wasn't enough blood to smother the fires and they had to try other things that didn't work as well to keep the heat and smoke and flames down. There was enough blood to go around, to smother the fire and keep back the flames and the heat. They looked for blood, miles away, to
find something to keep down the flames but they couldn't be stopped. Ten thousand gallons of blood wasn't enough to stop the heat and the smoke, but after two days it finally was over, and there was the fixed scorch that they wanted, steaming white and red and mostly black. No one can remember how long the smoke and the smell lingered. It is probably there still.
Coronado was exhausted. He had been talking for days, walking through the streets and telling King everything he knew. Besides the talking and the walks, he was being followed, and it was hard to keep track of everyone and everything they needed to tell. Billy, and King's father, and Babe and more besides. A huge group, they walked the streets day and night and the voices never seemed to stop. It was very difficult to keep up with all of the stories, and all the different ways they could describe pain and noise and heat. King could only hear him, so he had to talk with everyone, and so it was hard to keep with just one of the stories. He knew that this day would eventually come, and he had been waiting for it, but he could have never have been really ready. King asked so many questions, and most of them he couldn't answer without asking the others questions and letting them finally speak.

They walked the streets for days and days. Coronado's horse would get tired and only then did they stop. The voices never ended, though, and no one was patient enough to let anyone tell a story all the way through. Coronado only knew the ends to these stories, and King had always depended on the living to hear them. It was hardest to hear from Babe, who was working so hard to explain herself, to explain why she had stayed after everything had happened,
after all the lucky accidents and after she knew what it was doing to her. She said that she learned to stay close, to stop remembering how the noise felt and how the fire looked, how she could start believing that there were reasons and that the air was clearing, becoming sweeter, that there were springs that greened up like everyone else's did, that she learned to see the way the streets shone a certain way. King had to hear this, he had seen the way the city was set like a palace in the hills, he had shown others and pulled away curtains of air, but Coronado's voice sounded so tired and sometimes so far away, it was easier to hear the noise in the streets than these affirmations. He had to strain to hear what he had been chosen to hear, he had no sight left.

Coronado sifted the whole stories from the chants about duty and about work, there were sounds of clocks and of money, men voices arguing and rubber-soled boots landing against cement and metal ladder rungs. Like soft, running silt through fingers, sirens and hymns and silence and newspapers and whiteness and blackness and redness slipped over each other faster than each sharp grit could be caught between the ears. Along the street, X-rays caught up in the wind, one white and black transparent lace of skull bones after the other, weighted with opaque smudges in the centers, the weight making the mylar sheets spin and rub against each other; it was a river along the street, shining and black and constant, kicking up yellow and blue and orange pulsing flashes that chased the shine that glared off the black river. White paper banks with bleeding and obscuring red stamps contained it all and this is what King and
Coronado walked against for days, listening above the rush of the river to choruses of heat so loud no one else on the street could hear them.

They walked with them to the edge of town to watch the rivers pool around the base of the pumps that squealed in time with the voices and a boy counting to himself while he played on the biggest one and played brave games against himself with the blackness of the river clinging to the soles of his shoes. Men watched who carried other men who had been lucky enough only to break their back or scar the skin over the features of their faces, and these men made no noise in their rubber soled boots that found purchase in black mud and repelled the whirring yellow and blue and orange light that sparked off of everyone. They all knew Coronado, Coronado had found them all and made them wait for this in the silent corners and streets and hiding places of a city of gold that Coronado had never looked for but found himself in. None of it is what King had thought he had seen, there were stronger curtains of air that had been too heavy for him to lift.

King could not manage to order all of these voices in his mind, to make them measure against the oceans and palaces that he had seen, to understand which of these voices spoke of the legends he had been telling. He had dreamt the dreams differently, and known fires to be baptizing and cleansing and to be fueled by a hot and honest gold. His prophecy could not be made of rivers and voices and fires and noise that already had some kind of inevitable end that had been started by men with metal and papers and minds and voices so silent only the dead could hear them. What could be written that wasn’t already lodged
into the dreams of everyone he had ever known? How could all of this be so hard to hear and to see, so without fulfillment that he was tired and distracted, longing for something that was in front of all the curtains, like the stars and living hearts beating against his large hands? The smell was stronger, was starting to rush at him as he pulled from the sad translator and his horse, the river sinking into the sludge of the ground, the invisible wounds and graves and darting sparks. At his back, they all rose to a tower of black smoke and curled into the last sunset the spires of the city of gold would rest against.
Psalm

"Do you have it done, can I see it?" said King.

"I have never known what I was doing or why I was doing it." said Dot.

"I don’t know how much it matters," he said, and this surprised her.

"They have all been singing all along, I have only just heard it, but there needs to be something everyone can hear."

"Who will see it?"

"I don’t know. No one."

She shows it too him, the black ink on the white paper and no one knows if it is exactly right.
His hands are like hands for a piano
Singing to a city of gold
The city and he wait in the hills under black clouds
Where they have surfaced from under the oceans
Oceans that covered them millions and millions of years
Ago until they rested as black graves under the earth.
He has seen all of this before you mourned a city that had already fallen.
His father had been taken and his father's mother and the rest of his mother's
Sons in the fires burning from this city fire towering and hot with a sound Like
nothing so loud it takes all sound away. The people in this city are dreaming,
Dreaming of the fires rising from the center of this place, dreaming,
Dreaming of a man with dreams of his own who comes with every fire and
walks among the people in this city talking to no one, making himself known to
No one but a man with hands for piano and dreams no one can yet imagine.
This man has seen these dreams and it will be and is written what will happen
To the fathers and mothers and sons of daughters who are still there in the city
Of gold, the man knows the fire and the noise will come again and will not
leave Anything left, not even the haunted and the wandering. Those already
taken Were disregarded warnings of a time that has filled the streets since sun
has Broken across the prairies, after the oceans had drained and the deep green life Had been buried. The black evidence of graves has been trapped, waiting to Build something else that would burn upon itself. There have been other Prophets, this man is the very last of them and message will come with evidence. He will be told by an explorer, Coronado di Francisco, who the haunted will Come with, the singing graves will speak through, and the Prophet King will Know which message to bring to the living, to the ones with beating hearts and Silent ears. The prophecy is difficult, it is buried and it makes no noise.
Home

A scale model of the refinery in the Oil Museum in Eldorado takes up half of a large room and is a confusing white lace of tanks and towers and metal and pipes and incomprehensible structures. Walking around it, it is unimaginable that the model was built by humankind, that minds and hands organized metal and pipes and structures, and that it exists in life scale yards from where you might be standing in the room. If you are from Eldorado, you have seen this refinery all your life, and you have known people who have known how some small part of it works, or you know yourself how some small part of it works. You have complained or not complained of the smell it makes on hot days, damp days, cold days, any day except the days your body forgot it.

You have made gardens in your backyard in this town and harvest vegetables that were too small, or the wrong color, but after enough years you learned when you had produced a prize tomato crop or how to water the garden in such a way that the leaves would look greener. In school you learned something about oil and how it was made and when your sons and daughters got good jobs you knew how to talk about hazard pay and union benefits, and how to get certain kinds of stains out of heavy cotton. Things happened that lit
up the newspapers, if you had been there long enough but it was always taken care of and it always died down and there were people after these things happened that you didn’t see much of anymore, or sometimes visited in the hospital or at home, but most everyone you knew had good jobs and houses like yours and sons and daughters in heavy cotton and rubber soled boots and good pay.

In museums like the one you are standing in, there are strange stories you like to tell your children, stories about the strange name of the town that you lived in, how it was a city of gold, and men from far away places who searched for these cities and named them when they found gold. You have never felt the exotic here, but liked that these explorers had and knew how to look at the hills the same way you did when you slid over them on the turnpikes and watched for the signs and the topography that led to home. You have talked to people when you have gone out of town and you have told them where you are from, and it was amazing how many people thought they had people here and that made this town special, recognized, more than medium-sized with a strange smell you sometimes forgot to notice. You have always been able to visit your own family on Sundays, and the friends like family you have known for years, and you have watched your children play with other families and your family’s children.

You look carefully at the white model and think all of this and wonder about your own life that has become, without any doing on your part, incredibly safe. You are lucky and glad to be here in a thriving city of gold with all that
money running through pipes and machines and pumps and tanks you only barely understand. In this place, in hills made of hundreds of feet of rock floating on gold, you become certain of legends. In Eldorado, nobody dies, they just leave town.
The Book of King

King

Next to nothing is known of the prophet King, other than he was the son of a man who perished in the first Eldorado fires. Raised by his grandmother, his prophecies regarding the end of the city of gold were not heard and were transcribed by an equally little known psalmist, Dot. Dot wrote one liturgical psalm which emphasized King's prophecies; the psalms was found in draft and final form in a diary among the ruins. This book was carried out of Eldorado by King himself, and only speculation explains what might have happened to Dot. Coronado di Francisce, a sixteenth century New Spain explorer, figures heavily in both the psalm and the transcribed prophecies, confusing since Coronado was not known to have reached as far south and east as Eldorado. The dates of King's life and life as a contemporary prophet are difficult to determine, but must roughly coincide with the troubles at Eldorado and its downfall. The following is the extant transcriptions of his prophecy.

1 1. The word of the first dead that came to King, son of the dead: Hear this, hear this, you who have dreamt it before it was spoken, all of you who have worked in the tanks with rubber-
soled boots, have seen the fires during the troubles, who have struggled for air in a city of gold where the money clogged pipes and filled tanks and dammed rivers that ran through the hills. Hear this sons and daughters and mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers of those who have worked in the tanks with rubber-soled boots and good pay and dreams. You have known these words for years, words that have drawn line through the cells in your minds, have burned into the backs of your eyes and traveled between your breaths like roads, rivers, pipes, blood. All of you who have seen the fires and the blood and the white graves rising above palaces built by men who visited old oceans under the rock of the earth, hear this and wonder, hear this and pull the truth from your dreams, hear this, what is written and know it to be the witnesses of those you have buried: sons and daughters and mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers.

2. You have something to tell your sons and daughters and mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers that you have kept as secret silent graves and circling dreams of fire and heat. All of the warnings have already come and those warnings worked like false gilding onto your houses and streets, air and soil. It is too late for the warning, and what is coming cannot be stopped as light and heat and poisoned air cannot be stopped. Remember your mother lying in her grave, your father leaving in his rubber-soled boots, your grandmother and grandfathers money soaked in black until it sat heavy in their dreams. For the first time remember all the warnings you have forgotten and lift the gilded curtain away from the palace and see the dead and the future dead. See them walk the streets against
banks of silence and noisy rivers that run black and weeping, bite your teeth into all the gold and let your teeth scrape away what is concealing lead. Look at the faces of your sons and daughters and fathers and mothers and grandmothers and grandfathers and see in them the last generation breathing in a city of gold.

3. There isn’t anything left. You can see it in your dreams, you already knew, you are all visionaries, prophets, the men with their drills and their pipes and their tanks have told you already. What wasn’t taken by the drills was taken by the pumps, what wasn’t taken by the pumps was burned in the tanks, what wasn’t burned by the tanks was welcomed into your air, your soil, your gardens, your bodies, your secrets, the changeable cells.

4. You have all been sleeping, and dreaming, the city of gold is a city of sleepwalkers, unknowingly dreaming of the end. There will be no time for grieving, for searching, for finding anything salvageable among the ashes, the chances for finding, for sifting through the silt was over as soon as the oceans receded underneath the hills and made their graves. What could I, or the others who came before me have told you to keep you from the hills? to let them rest under the sun? to prevent the palaces from being built? These hills were invaded as soon as their creation, invaded by men unearthing the graves oceans left behind them. I am too late, my voice is lost inside a noise no one ever heard, covered by black words that make stories that other men and women have lived: stories of working on pipes and tanks and pumps too dangerous to be even near, of leaking vapors and signs of danger. These signs and these stories were
not loud enough to retell, could not harden into inheritances, they crumbled like the mortar from which this city of gold was built. The men and women I asked for these stories had forgotten them, or told them to me in halves and pieces that were fastened to other halves and pieces only weakly. The dead had not forgotten them, and the dead told them to me, but no one had walked with these dead soon enough. The dead are your own sons and daughters and fathers and mothers and grandmothers and grandfathers, but you buried them well under poisoned soil and silence. There was one who could reach them, an explorer who knew something about cities of gold, but he could do nothing but reach them and walk with me while they followed and witnessed. There was one who could listen, who could sing, but I will lose her, she will be lost to me because of the forgetting, and the deep dreams, and the deafness that runs through here like rivers of black oil.

5. I would tell you to weep, to cry, to lament, to elegize, to wail, to grieve, but the fires will come too fast for weeping. There have been corners and hiding places in this city that have sheltered the weeping, but the mourning has never been louder than the noise of explosions. Everything is devestated. The earth is devastated, the air is devastated, the water is devastated, the women are devastated, the men are devastated, the bones in the men and the women are devastated, the ghosts are devastated, this prophet and his scribe are devastated. Everything fails. The earth has failed, the air has failed, the water has failed, the women have failed, the men have failed, the bones in the men and the women have failed, the ghosts have failed, this prophet and his scribe have failed. Joy, grief,
dreams, love, silence, time, lies, haunting, beliefs, and death are devastated and have failed.

6. Everything is withheld from the people in this city of gold. Truth has been withheld since the men first came with their drills and their dams of money. Clean bodies in a clean city has been withheld since the men first came with their drills and their dams of money. Exits through the hills from the city have been withheld since the men first came with their drills and their dams of money. The end has been foretold long before it has made it here under the hand of my scribe. Now nothing can be done but to call a gathering, to wait under the long shadows of the tanks and the pipes and the graves. You may not cry out in this gathering, rail against what has been foretold long before it made it here under the hand of my scribe. This gathering is a gathering of waiting, of communal acknowledgment of an end already recorded in history. This gathering has heard the noise before, has felt the heat and seen the flames, has smothered it all with blood until it steams in black scorch. I am a prophet of nothing, I have seen nothing that has not been seen in the dreams of those gathered, I can only bring the nothing out of dreams and give it a voice that equals the frequency of a noise the gathering may finally hear. Assemble, knowing their is nothing to cry out against, assemble in a place that has only invited ghosts. Assemble, but I will not be with you, I will not burn in a place that has never wanted me, a place that has taken so much from me.

7. This is what I mourn for. love. Love may have made me deaf, may have silenced the dead around me, the dead and their
stories. I have felt the fires like you have, and could have borne
the end had it been for a small space of time with arms around
me and a heart against me. I have lost more than you will; I
have lost then end with a beginning before it, for I have seen no
beginning. Your silence has created small spaces for you to love,
has defeated the grief and loss of the end, has defeated the grave
completely. Everyone who has loved will be consumed by the
heat in the end, but you will haunt the hills married indelibly to
each other while I will wander in places where I can no longer
see the smoke that will rise from the city like a palace.

8. The fire will devour every line that has woven through your
bodies since you have come to this city. Blackness and blood
will be left in its place and the edges will be hot with smoke for a
generation. The earth will close off its passages to the ocean
underneath and no more men will come and invade this place.
Where there is scorch, there will be less than the faintest of
memories, and dreams dreamt in the night will be forgotten
before morning. The road will slowly curve away from where
you have been and nothing will visit but wind and heat from
the sun. It will not been seen from any far-off summit, and no
papers or words will float from this place into the hands of
others. Everything else that continues will be too far to even
catch the end of the echoes that may ring from this city, and the
earth will orbit and spin with an imperceptibly different tilt
because of what has been removed from it so completely. The
hills will move in closer, to cover this place with their rocky,
heavy roots and no more explorers will mistake nothing for
gold.
1. What has been started from the beginning of this place will be completed as soon as this prophecy is written. There is no warning to sound that has not already been trumpeted, there is no newspaper with fast enough dates to stop the destruction. I am a prophet with worthless news, I am late, but generations of prophets before me were late also. No psalm has been sung loud enough to save anyone, this prophecy seems to be for myself alone. There will be a day darker than the others, louder than the others, hotter than the others, thicker with odor than the others, full of more flames than the others, but by the dawning of this day it will be over. It comes, and it comes with more power, but the days of trouble that have come before have only been slightly less powerful, and completely powerful for those already dead. There are other cities with like prophecies, for which their days has not come, and will not come for ages after this city's, but the burning of Eldorado will not warn or spur the prophets of these other cities. The flames have burned in front of and behind everyone, everyone has seen them, but the wilderness of scorch that follows every burning is so utterly covered as to be a pauper's grave. I cannot describe the leaping of the flames that close in like armies of warriors any better than they have been played out in dreams. You have already forgotten that it has happened, you have already found your refuge of silence. You have already endured, seen, dreamt, witnessed, and my failing is that this cannot be a prophecy for those enduring, seeing, dreaming, and witnessing.

2. The comfort and solace came before the end, and so what would be expected now is anger, but who is there to rail against but ourselves and ourselves of previous generations? There
will be nothing left to return to, nothing to use to heal our hearts and bodies, and there is no mercy; the mercy has already come, in the dreams and in the silences. What was passed over and suppressed was the anger and the railing, the refusal to see this prophecy out, the assembly of our own armies against the fires. How many of us vigiled over hopeless bedsides and dreaded news? How many of us visited the sick and nearly lost of our neighbors and forgot them as soon as we reached our own doors? How many of us buried the sludge and the poisoned fruit, breathed shallow through our noses, sent our sons and daughters fathers and mothers grandmothers and grandfathers to the tanks in rubber-soled boots? Here were the moments to rail and to weep, to prophecy and to notice. The noise and the flames of the end will completely dissolve us, so where have our cries been lingering? Where have they been hanging, waiting for us to take them down? There is no one to cry out against but ourselves, and this must explain our reluctance to crying out. In your last assembly and gathering, there will be no crying out. You will leave your homes and your families, your friends and your work; you will leave them violently and without a last breath, but you will have done so willingly. You will have volunteered for the moment since all that burned before you burned without notice, felled those you loved without notice, removed your voice without notice. There has been no weeping in this city of gold since the men made it. No tears will smother any flame that ever rises from it.

3. I have told you of the beginning, of love, of the dead, of the stories of ghosts, of things wounded and scarred and buried. What I cannot prophesy is a message of mercy or redemption, of
a line of clean, gold land. I have told you of the forget that will engender forgetfulness in the end, of the scorch of land that will be reclaimed by the land and of the nothingness. Understand that from the first edge of heat and first wave of noise that marks the first inhalation of the end, there is no new beginning. No sacrifice or reconsideration, pleading or late remembering will hold back and smother the flames this time. You have been pleaded with to notice, you have seen what the flames can do, have known how hard it is to smother the flames with blood. All this has been sifted from the earth and reburied, gone unclaimed. I have not found a glimmer or spark or pulse of mercy, of retrying of old ways and old ways of living life. If you have to find comfort, find it in your sameness: all cities of gold are raided and destroyed, not one is safe enough, and there are nor enough secrets in our world to protect them. There is no reparation, no more clean graves to pull from the earth, no feasting that will satisfy. Mostly, there are no promises of new beginnings; there was one beginning that has led to one end. You can only know that what will happen here, in this city of gold, will never happen exactly like this again; and I would say that the way it will happen will remind others of what they have been told about their own prophecies, but there is no city of gold that can bee protected by what can be seen and named, not anymore.

4. I have said before that I will not be among you, that I will have left before the end. There will be no afterward, I cannot claim that your sons and daughters and their sons and daughters for ever after will prophesy; I cannot claim that their will be any more dreams, or that their will be anymore visions. To
continue prophecy, to continue dreams, to continue visions, there must be a reclamation, a reconciliation. There were chances before the last fires, for reclamation and reconciliation, for prophets with voices. I have only seen blood and fire and columns of smoke. I have only seen the terrible day that leaves nothing but ghosts and is absorbed into the bodies of the hills. This prophecy is what you have been waiting for, these are the words that have been threading together your dreams with black lines and heat.

1. When at last there seems to be no more troubles, when the men regard their rubber-soled boots, cotton clothes, and hazard pay only quaint and old-fashioned; when there seem to be days where the air is sweet and every leaf green and every fruit from the earth ripe with color; when the forgetting is so complete as to blur the dreams of the people and to capture and bury the noise and the heat into graves deeper than the oceans under the hills; when this city of gold resembles, this, what has been seen, then what has been gathering around the tanks since the beginning will build completely and lethally, it will gather and contain all of the fire and heat possible and remove the silence forever. This explosion will remove the silence as well as it will remove the houses and streets, the tanks and pipes, the schools and gardens, the water and land. The citizens, too, will be removed, removed to places of haunting and isolation. There will be nothing left but the blackest scorch and columns of smoke that will obscure the sun and the stars for so long that those who notice the stars over Eldorado will come to think of them, always, as slightly smeared across the sky. As well as its people forgot, others will forget, and there will be nothing to see
left. This is what has been seen; here, it is what has been written.

2. In other prophecies, the prophet would rally the people with the spoken prophecy, with its words and warnings. There is no precedent for the late prophet, for the prophet who has seen but cannot speak in time. What is the purpose of these words then? Are they just gray words on crumbling paper, archived and unlabeled, meaningful to no one but to the care of the scribe? I know that I will carry these words out with me, and though I have seen that nothing reaches anyone after the end of this city, these words must have some purpose of comfort, of record, of substance that men and women lived in a city of gold, married and learned, worked and played, had sons and daughters and mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers. They cannot bear witness to the end, but in their lives they have bore witness to love and to work and to dreams that rang with noise and burned with heat. I will carry these words out with me, alone with the smoke rising behind me, no longer haunted by the stories of ghosts I have never seen. Already, Coronado is gone, he will not stay to take the people with him, the dead before now only went with him to get to me.

3. There is a city of gold, and it glows in the hills with gilding the color of the sun. You have known those that live there, you have seen the roads that lead to it. It is a real place with real people. It is shadowed by endless tanks and pipes, and its air and water and land is filled with poison and waste. It is a place filled with people who cannot stop dreaming about flames and heat that have seen or that they will see. It is a place filled with
ghosts who have been overwhelmed by the silences of the living, and there are multitudes of these ghosts. It is a place that has nurtured and raised generations of prophets, from the time the oceans finally settled under the earth. That it will be left to smoke and forget does not erase what came before its end. The smoke and the forget to not smother what love and grief has been had here, what people have lived before they succumbed. There is a place with hills that gather the sky from the bottom, that hold down the biggest ocean the world has ever seen. This place is real and it speaks from underneath the horizon, it has something to say that can be heard if the smoke from this city is followed, carefully, as it sinks into the stars.