From Bridges
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Please note:
Italics are drawn from William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom,* and bold text from *The United States Governed by Six Hundred Thousand Despots*: *A True Story of Slavery* by John Jacobs

sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon

I know I won't send this until she's dead. But she already lives with ghosts. She'll tell you that history is a kind of bridge. She'll tell you a lot of things even if you don't ask. High ceilings and crown molding, porticoes, and wedding nooks, she describes as though nothing bad can happen within beautiful architecture. The beautiful architecture that could only house beautiful people.

his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a Commonwealth

She blows in with her own dead paint. I remember opening the door once to a room with no floor. It had sunk in. The now poor, who idolized a time when they believed they were rich. A family that became less educated with every passing generation. They imagine every past man a gentleman. The past could never be other than gentle.

<<They were dealing in human flesh and, as a matter of course, must make it appear all right in the eyes of the world.>>

Everything is a ghost story after holding still the warm dead in your arms.

years ago, we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the war came and made the ladies into ghosts

History is golden if that's how you want to remember it and escape yourself. Otherwise, you are chased by ghosts or live among them, alongside them. The orphan children or wayward relatives somehow dropped on your doorstep. A woman baking pies takes them in, fattens them up. This is how the generations continue, consuming the heavy custard of the cursed, a pantry crammed full of it.

The discharge of our curse . . . . thank God this is all; at least I now know all of it.

It was a spring of fragile cold.

And for a time, death was the only thing that bloomed at my fingertips. And I held it there still, even as time passed through me. A seed cotton of a house built for vanity by vanity. The history we make and remake is a costume for the insecure. The narcissism of enrobing oneself in a family story and omitting all of the actual people, all of the souls that made that very moment in time possible. No house is pulled out of the mud by one pair of hands. It is a world constructed by the very people one obliterates in its construction.

It was a summer of wistaria.

I am connected to her and to this past through the lies she has spun about it, and the truth I unwound on my own. That wound, I am a part of the aggrieved jaw, angry of the history I did not make, but I'm forced to carry. Must carry while she stokes a legend.

transmogrified into a mask looking back with passive and hopeless grief upon the irrevocable world

Irreversible truth of the dead and their dying. The tactile textile of a blanket left with the scent; the leaving always a loss left as a footprint. The chalk outline of the shape of who there once was. The asking for and denying of breath. It keeps repeating. Time and its bellows, the aged lungs of experience that grieve to restart, reclaim, remember. I am pale with guilt. I am unsure where to put this skin down.

<<as far as the fleshmonger may see fit to carry them>>

The only thing left to do was burn it. The gods made me do it. They came to me in the form of a bull, a horse, a woman with milk. They told me the body is a thing, a hand. To give the farm your hands. The curse came to the muddy soil. And we soaked our hands in it, the dirt pushed far underneath our fingernails til they ached. We scrubbed and scrubbed and couldn't brush it from ourselves. And then it turned to rot, a stench of bodies stacked and crowded, living and dead, all the same.

formal and funereal . . . . This bound maidservant to flesh and blood waiting even now to escape it by writing a schoolgirl's poetry about the also-dead

Daughter of: confederacy / revolution. To be the daughter of the sins of the layers of the womb. The voir dire of historical sin, the original sin of the flesh made subject to. Seeking to absolve. Seeking absolution absolute. What is it like to be among the ghosts and not realize you are one too? Eyes always casting backward thoughts in a fever archive.

Peering inside the hole into a peep show of hauntings.

Because that's what a Southern lady is.

….it is as though she were living on the actual blood itself like a vampire

Living on the blood of a history she wants told and wants to tell until we somehow interrupt her with awe or a thousand questions to tell us more. But we don't.

These are the roots you can prove and want to disprove by the way you have chosen to live your life forward. The wraiths of a wrathful winding up of humanity to unmake and un-human. The rolling bells not beautiful but made of the demands of atonement. I repair to, retire to. Try to trap the malignant myth back in the box.