

THE GOOD DARK

Ryan Van Winkle was born in New Haven, Connecticut. His debut collection, *Tomorrow, We Will Live Here*, was published by Salt in 2010. His poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *New Writing Scotland*, *Scotland on Sunday* and Carcanet's *Oxford Poets* series. He has performed the poetry/theatre show *Red, Like Our Room Used to Feel* at Battersea Arts Centre, London Literature Festival and Edinburgh Festival Fringe. He was awarded a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship in 2012. He lives in Edinburgh.

ALSO BY RYAN VAN WINKLE

POETRY

Tomorrow, We Will Live Here (Salt Publishing, 2010)

ViewMaster (Stewed Rhubarb, 2014)

RECORDS

Red, Like Our Room Used To Feel (Forest Records, 2012)

The Good Dark

Ryan Van Winkle

Penned in the Margins

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For my brothers

*'The place from which you take your orders
is probably the most secret place you have.'*

Athol Fugard

The Good Dark

The Duke in Pines

I woke up with Duke Ellington in Pines
like there was nothing else: no muesli, nor porridge,
just Ellington and Pines and so it seemed
I needed to write you a postcard

telling you *I am okay*. That yes,
it's been a sacrificial three years – but then
I come across the smell of pink soap, pine sap
stuck between cords or a greyhound
snuffing my hand and I think

I ought to write a long letter that says:
I am doing well. The forest is high
with berries that stain my boots red,
like our room used to feel. And yes,
I am in woods – literal or metaphorical,
you can put me wherever is easy – in a room
where wind always wuthers or in the trunk
of an old, dead tree. I always put you in a dress
you never wore but I used to touch

every day, getting my shirt or tie
or sometimes I would open the door and look
at the lichen thing, wonder why it had to hang
like an unwatered fern, wonder if it ever wanted you

the way I sometimes wanted you. And, of course, it was just a dress and it could not say. And I was just a young man and I could not say, even about a dress that did nothing but hang.

I couldn't talk about it. So, what chance was there for us when I would walk every night and count one thousand street lamps? If I ever woke with Ellington and pines you know I would not wake you to say, would not write it on scrap paper and leave it for breakfast. I'd just keep Duke Ellington in Pines in my mind, walk with it, take it to the pictures, buy it a pop, let it rest on my shoulder during long journeys. I would smoke Duke Ellington in Pines with friends and so I am today, smoking Duke Ellington, wanting to pin him down, write him, in pines, to you.

§

'How I lived a childhood in snow...'

The Decemberists

All my childhood was snow: summer snow
below the fires of the Forth and September
snow in my bowl, rushed before the bus rose
up a pelted hill.

And sometimes I am sure
if you cut me open I would not be recognized
as white, as anything but smoke. Sometimes
all my words were snow and I would push

or pile them in the corner
of my room. I would lie
in bed and watch porn sprout

under snow at the end of the spectrum, snow
so much I forget the names of little flowers

father calls weeds. And still I have
whole years of snow. I return to snow
like a salmon and like salmon I know

the agony of arriving. Is this any way to spend
a day, a life, ploughing snow? Maybe I should
let them be, let the crystals pile high, raise
the roof beams — maybe this week or next
I will place one rare flake in a cigar box,
leave it at your door by way of explanation.