Advance Praise for
AMASA SPEAKER FACTORY

"Brilliant and beguiling; this book is magnetic as the Yooper iron that binds it. Chad Faries' U.P. rock opera, *Amasa Speaker Factory* is a tantalizing mindmeld memory—divine, devilish, decidedly intensified hardscrabble, tumultuous reckoned life—pierced with the cold flames of youthful gains shredding loss. This is a stunning compilation, delivery so clean, the heart skips less beats when we up and lose ourselves; don't dare put it down. This literary prize is an incredible, enigmatic flash-spark that encapsulates humanity beneath all odds, seeped deep-sinked into ironies with Waits-like spun songs. Pick it up, engage, and hold on hard; let Faries take the lead and deliver us home—*somehow, some day, somewhere*." —Allison Adelle Hedge Coke, author of *Look at This Blue*

"Chad Faries' *Amasa Speaker Factory* is a brilliant book, a literature of roller rinks and huffy bikes and homegrown weed and Ford Galaxies with overheated radiators and Greyhound buses, a busted Mason jar spilling its river stones, a seventies and eighties far-northern Midwest where wilderness has been decades reclaiming mine ruins, radio waves reach through decades as your sweet, tired town 'calls you home with a radio dial' and that old music sings again through speakers from those same years with voices that will grow with long grass between railroad ties into the someday company of poems. Faries asks, 'where oh where / has that / little boy gone' and like Wordsworth's, his book answers. Here. All along. Safe through every depravation, death, threat, and neglect. Loved. And father now to the man he'll become." —Jonathan Johnson, author of *Pine*

"In stunning images, Chad Faries' *Amasa Speaker Factory* brings alive the complex essence of a community, era, and place, then traces its unraveling by time. At once 'a reliquary of cosmic signals' and a 'dance among the taxidermy,' the book straddles ode and elegy. With finesse, the author gives voice to the ineffable. Each 'scribble of brackish water squeezed from a rag of a sky' becomes poetry. Faries fills this haunting collection with unexpected moments of holy, a broken holy that nevertheless endures." —Kimberly Blaeser, author of *Ancient Light* and past Wisconsin Poet Laureate

"When the mines left, the children remained to run wild through the ruins, to be raised on pot, alcohol, and a rocking-chair history of their world. DJ Dr. Chad broadcasts *Storytelling Time* through the static of the otherwise empty airwaves. It's the tale of an almost post-apocalyptic childhood that is simultaneously every child's *Lord of the Flies* paradise adventure come true. It is filled with decay and neglect, rust and nature's revenge—and yet all the excitement and hope of a confused teenager's erection. Grab those floor mats you pulled from that '71 Ford rusting in that field. Sit yourselves cross-legged in front of sort-of-grandpa's transistor radio. And tune in." —Jesse Koenig, U.P. Poet Laureate

"Like folks from the U.P., *Amasa Speaker Factory* is honest and hardworking, a collection of poems so finely written, we can read each without the least bit of wincing. There is an irreverent tone to be admired here as well. In 'The Escape: Naked in Wauchula,' the poem lifts up over the stern edict from Old Testament and leans into a red-hot summer of skinny-dipping and snake hunting. This writer has always been about risk-taking and mythmaking though, both in his poetry and in his adventures. I'll be reading this ambitious collection over and over again. Not just out of sheer joy and wonder—but because I just don't want to miss a thing." —Denise Sweet, Wisconsin Poet Laureate

"Chad Faries' *Amasa Speaker Factory* is unlike any book I've read recently. Set in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, it's informed by an intense sense of locations and identity, yet unlike books with similar personal obsessions, it has an integrity and elegance that transcends them and makes reading it through from the beginning a source of pure pleasure." —John Koethe, author of *Cemeteries and Galaxies*

"*Amasa Speaker Factory* is an epic anthem of love and despair, a luscious, unflinching tribute to a community that began its economic decline long before the rest of America knew what was coming. In expansive, incantatory verse, Faries summons the ecological, historical, and cultural quintessence of a land forgotten by mainstream America, full of startling diversity and the resilient beauty of sacred, libidinous, damaged humanity. Faries masterfully captures the grit and glory of these angelheaded Yoopers burning wild with whiskey and weed in the dark, decaying machinery of America's heart. Embrace all hope, ye who enter here." —Jayson Iwen, author of *Roze & Blud*

AMASA SPEAKER FACTORY

poems

Chad Faries

Modern History Press
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CONTENTS

Foreword i

Prelude: WIKB Telephone Time

Yer on Da Air 3

Part One: The Ballad of Iron County

The Ballad of Iron County 11

Part Two: 14 Songs for 9/10 of the 70s: Iron Land

Boat 23
Riding Guernica 26
Late Fall Strawberries are Divine 28
We 30
Pity Me Not 31
Field Trip 33
Alley Cats 36
The Wrongs of Spring 38
Fleeting Grace 39
Bang-Bang 40
Blind Barb's Son 42
The Escape: Naked in Wauchula 44
Mythologies of Currents 48
Since I've Been Loving You: for 9/10 of a Decade 51

Part Three: Old-Fashioned Street Dance

Iron Family Vignettes 55
How Thinking of West Brings Me to My Sister 57
You Aren't Missing 58
9th Avenue Love Song and Run 59
Quills 61

Empire 63
Waterways 65
Twilight Triad 66

Part Four: Death Metal

Pamphlet: Death Poem #1 69
The Pits: Death Poem #2 70
Girl Scouts at Hospice: Death Poem #3 71
Disney at Hospice: Death Poem #4 72
Bob Dylan and the Celtic Women at Hospice: Death Poem #5 73
With Your Tongue, Sometimes in September, Crows Can Be Killed 74
Three Rails 75
Taking Your Hands Off the Wheel 77

Part Five: Cadenzas for Young Whippersnappers

Cadenza for 711 Roosevelt: An Origin Story 81
Cadenza for Vladimir Holan's "Reminiscence" 85
Shifting Cadenza for Mother and Jozsef Attila 88
Talking Heads Cadenza 89
Ghost Train Cadenza 90

Postlude: TTPalooza

Sign Off 95

Notes 100
Credits 102
Acknowledgments 103
About the Author 104

Foreword

These poems were written around the world but largely position themselves in the mystery of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan (U.P.). They draw from autobiographical experiences, though, as with most poetry, I would still say each poem has a "speaker" who isn't necessarily the living and breathing Chad Faries. For readers, some geographical, biographical, and historical context may be helpful.

I was born in Battle Creek, Michigan, in May 1971 to a 17-year-old mother who had a one-night stand with a man ten years her senior, passing through town on a 1970 Triumph Tiger. She never told him about me. I found him 27 years later, and we shared a contentious friendship. That brief affair made Gramma a grandmother at 37. She was on her fourth husband, who had secured a job above the Mackinaw Bridge in a little mining town, Iron River, where most of the mines had already closed, and the whole region was in decline. He had four teenage boys and a girl, and Gramma had four teenage girls, with Mother being the oldest. Gramma told "Grampa Duke" that if he didn't move all the kids up there, she was done with him. So, at six months old, I was moved with everyone to 711 Roosevelt Street in Iron River, Michigan. Though Mother was primarily nomadic, throughout my childhood, we always ended up back in Iron County. Almost all the kids Gramma and Grampa Duke moved there stayed, leaving a profound imprint on the county.

Iron County was originally inhabited by the Anishinaabe, also known as the Ojibwe or Chippewa. The French trapper Brule made first contact in the late 1600s. It wasn't until the mid-to-late 1800s that significant iron ore deposits were discovered, drawing settlers to the area. This led to the establishment of mining operations across the county and beyond. There are still Anishinaabe families in the county and throughout the region. As a side note, two of my poetry mentors, Denise Sweet and Kim Blaeser, are powerful Anishinaabe elders.

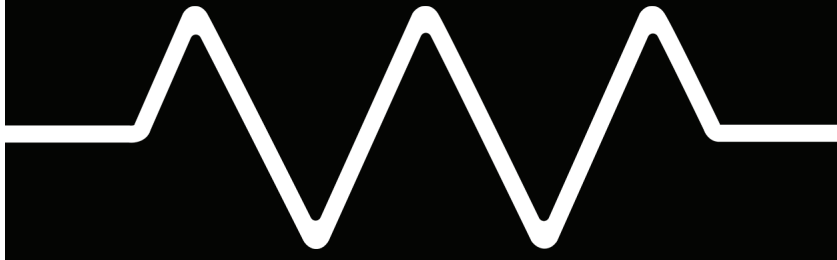
Iron County's population in the 1970s was about 15,000, with its main centers forming a triangle across an otherwise wild landscape dotted with caving grounds and remnants of the mining industry. To the southwest is West Iron County, a cluster of adjacent communities: Iron River, Stambaugh, Caspian, and Gaastra, along with a number of "locations," small settlements built by mining companies. On the southeastern side is

Crystal Falls, the county seat, said to have been stolen one drunken night from Iron River. Adjacent to Crystal Falls is the village of Alpha. To the north and center is Amasa, the smallest population center and arguably the most renegade. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, we lived all over the county but eventually moved to the cultural capital of the U.P., Marquette, for my high school years (1984–89). With 30,000 people, Marquette felt like a huge metropolis.

The western U.P. sits atop northern Wisconsin. Because of this, Yoopers in this region have a much stronger connection to Wisconsin than to Lower Michigan, which is nearly four hours away. While one of only two landlocked counties in the U.P., Iron County has over 400 lakes and nearly a dozen named rivers and creeks, all part of the Menominee River watershed, which flows into Lake Michigan. The Iron River, running through the city of Iron River, flows into the Brule before reaching the Menominee. The Paint River flows through Crystal Falls into the Brule. In Amasa, the Hemlock flows into the Paint. What has always been magical to me is imagining that from any of these rivers, you could navigate a water route to any major port in the world.

PRELUDE

WIKB Telephone Time



Yer on Da Air

1.

Radio waves hold over Iron County, Michigan—
phantasmic drift of WIKB, broadcast
circling the frostline, bouncing off birch
and tamarack, ice shanties; vibrating down
the stringers of walleye, humming in the roller skates
and tenderloins of teens buzzing through Caspian,
at the Rolladium, its floor lacquered by pop and sweat,
threading through names we say and those we don't.
It's the sound of iron turning solid gold,
then country, then classics, then country classics.
It's Telephone Time! 9 to noon
since 1965, selling our wares, airing our cares;
peddling gossip, *don't cha know.*

The interplay of the populace
and the pageantry of forests
can't be fully communed in prose, *eh?*
There is static, a panic,
like in 1893, when the economy tanked,
the mines closed,
Iron River turned to farming—
the land already cleared by timber.
Farmhouse beacons still there,
and the faded fury of outbuildings,
splinters of rotted trusses,
and rusted horse tack. They're still there
along the seal-coated county roads
over the rolling hills hewing
a radio drift no antenna can correct.

We lived and loved exponentially
in those old farmhouses,

frolicked in the pits,
played in the mining headframes
as if they were ancient ruins.
In time, moss and weed won,
birch vallary spiking from cliff edges,
heralding a new era that we can't quite tune

in.

The Wiercos bought one
when Ray returned from 'Nam,
drank himself silly in the barn;
couldn't shake the sound of helicopters
no matter how loud he played the radio.
Decades before that, fields squandered
in Depression. Hard seasons,
ribcaged along the horizon.

The bulletins are called in and a thousand
bent and weathered antennae bow down ...
Riverton, closed— Hanna, closed—
Cannon Mine, closed— Seldon,
Alpha Mine, Longyear Mine,
Mastodon Mine, closed— McGovern, Baker,
Book, Balkan Judson Mine, closed—
Homer-Wasika mine, closed—
Hiawatha No. 1, Sheridan, Forbes, Richards,
Crystal Mine, closed— Warner Mine, closed—

Great Western Iron Star Mine, closed—

Until in 1978 Sherwood Mine closes.
Now only miles of state-line trails and old tracks
underscore industrial loss and nature's return.

We celebrate the Italians,
their defiance in the rum rebellion of the Twenties,
refusing to stop making wine,

the feds relented—
but we don't talk so much about
Methcathinone, the Nineties,
when the feds never relented
and sort-of-uncle Vern was jailed.

Your U.P. minute, brought to you by Aramarck:
Dress Confidently, Act Bravely.
The name of Fence River is derived from a translation—
the Indian [sic] word *mitchigan,*
a wooden fence near its banks,
built for catching deer and failed relationships.

We know these things.
You can look them up.

But you don't know the real Seventies blundering through
a pair of Amasa speakers, built in the bowels of the old school,
broadcasting the soundtrack for the Diablo Lobos
gamboling down Main Street Stambaugh,
doing burnouts with their panheads and ape hangers,
rumbling at TJT's Nirvana Bar; Stabbing Butch Testini,
while pregnant aunt Faith hid under a barstool
and mom served up stiff drinks.

Or the Jack-o-Lantern on Genesee in the
Eighties, Dee-Dee's downstate go-go girls
baring it all for the hunters.
Brunch at the Branding Iron 10-2.
Header Inn, Jump Inn. *Robin's got cod,*
perch and walleye this Friday
at Guiliani's. Closed. Closed. Closed.
The Cloverland and its infamous upstairs
apartment peddling pot and not
for decades. Condemned. Razed.

Jay Berry for 44 years deejaying,
calling the floats and Clydesdales

at the Rodeo Parade, retired. Old-fashioned
street dances, and the squeeze of accordion
and the splash of dunk-tanks drowned out.

Aunt Amy painting the founders at the
Iron County Historical Museum,
and censoring the Grecian penises painted
on the walls of the recently acquired
Brandon Giovanelli house, creator
of the West Iron County Wykon
mythological mascot. Always sharp
in his dandy suitcoat, not too effeminate,
loved his mother with all his heart; Never married
but beloved by all, except Aunt Holly who "hated that dick
no matter how many penises he painted." Deceased.

The Pentoga powwows. Echoes. *"Way, hey ya,*
hey ya. Oh, yes, I love you, honey dear.
I don't care if you've been married 15 times,
I'll get you yet! I miss my sweetheart,
I miss my sweetheart. she's in jail!

Way, ya hey ya, hey ya."

2.

There is a moment in recollection—
a shift from embarrassment to pride
when your nostalgia wins and after
all the Odysseys, Iron River calls
you home with a radio dial.

Black Jack my trickster siren at the rock
in the center of the Paint River at the
crook of Shady Lane, where we bathed
for decades. Calling.

He says squint at the reflection in the ripple
of a beaver's tail slap,
hear a distant wave blasting from a maple box,
on an Amasa speaker at the Rusty Sawblade
and you'll come running.
As a kid, I swam in half
the three hundred lakes lying on
my back naked and dreaming, peeing
like a Parisian fountain,
fantasizing about foreign lands.

The equations I knew
were simple:
how far to the next shore,
how cold the water,
how long before supper.

As poet, I am the road commissioner—
I must know in winter
when to dirt,
when to salt,
when it's right to plow,
when to call
a snow day.
And after the season, assess
the damage, manage
projects, coordinate
the budget,
And tell it all slant
on Telephone Time.

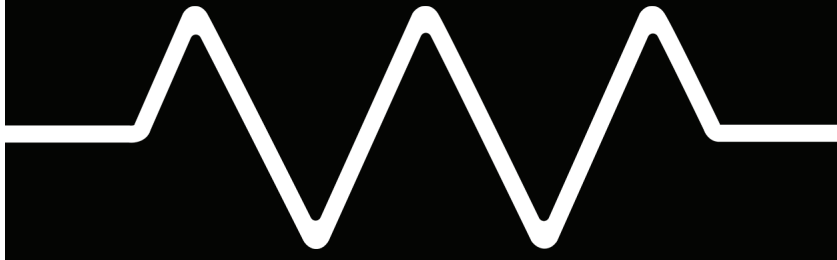
All of us
angels, brooding—
still here, caught between that
embarrassment and pride,
between snowmelt and static,
our history fleeting,
still running,

as the signal of WIKB
hovers above,
waiting, always almost
landing, never quite fading

away.

PART TWO

14 Songs for 9/10 of the 70s:
Iron Land



Boat

Verde, que te quiero verde
verde viento, verde ramas
—Lorca, "Sleepwalker's Ballad"

Lorca green was the grass in August.
A slight headache of sky, tension under my Roosevelt St.

heaven. Loving that summer. Cartoons every morning. Summer
of six nights when mother left and I ran through
the graveyard toward a frayed hammock and swung
all night with sort-of-sis-Susan
until my dirty feet
were wet
and anointed with stars.

Mother had left with that Italian in a Mole-Lake bluegrass flurry.

I came home after running across Nelson Field, wind
hard on my face, on my chest, racing Bociek home.

Smile. Sun as I ran in summer. Run.
Run. Then home to no-
thing but a house full

of wait.

So I left the house of waiting for
the waiting outside. Ran, run-
ning to sort-of-sis-Susan with tears
in my ears across Lincoln and,

and Mother passed in that Ford
Galaxie. I saw her fat hand hang-
ing out the window, cigarette ash
cherry trails and her after-
noon shadow racing the street.

I ran through the cemetery past
the dead-end sign and trampled over
the spent plastic flowers to a house
just slightly more responsible,
with matching shingles, less wait,
but still full of alcoholism and enigmas
and Susan's mother always folding me in
to

Break this line into a white space

and let it be significant.

Mother was hot that summer like that radiator over-
heating and cracked under the hood.

Oh that hot Italian boat love was enough to take her away
for those six days. Waiting up with a house on fire.

Oh Rock. Can't you see I'm bleedin'.
You were the first that swirled,
painted the mandolin on evening.
With that kiss you were spring
to me. Cling to me. You were
different. A narrative ripped
to shreds fueling a moon on fire.

Complete heavenly ash. You haze
the day beautifully. Ultimately.

And on that last day of the six she'd return

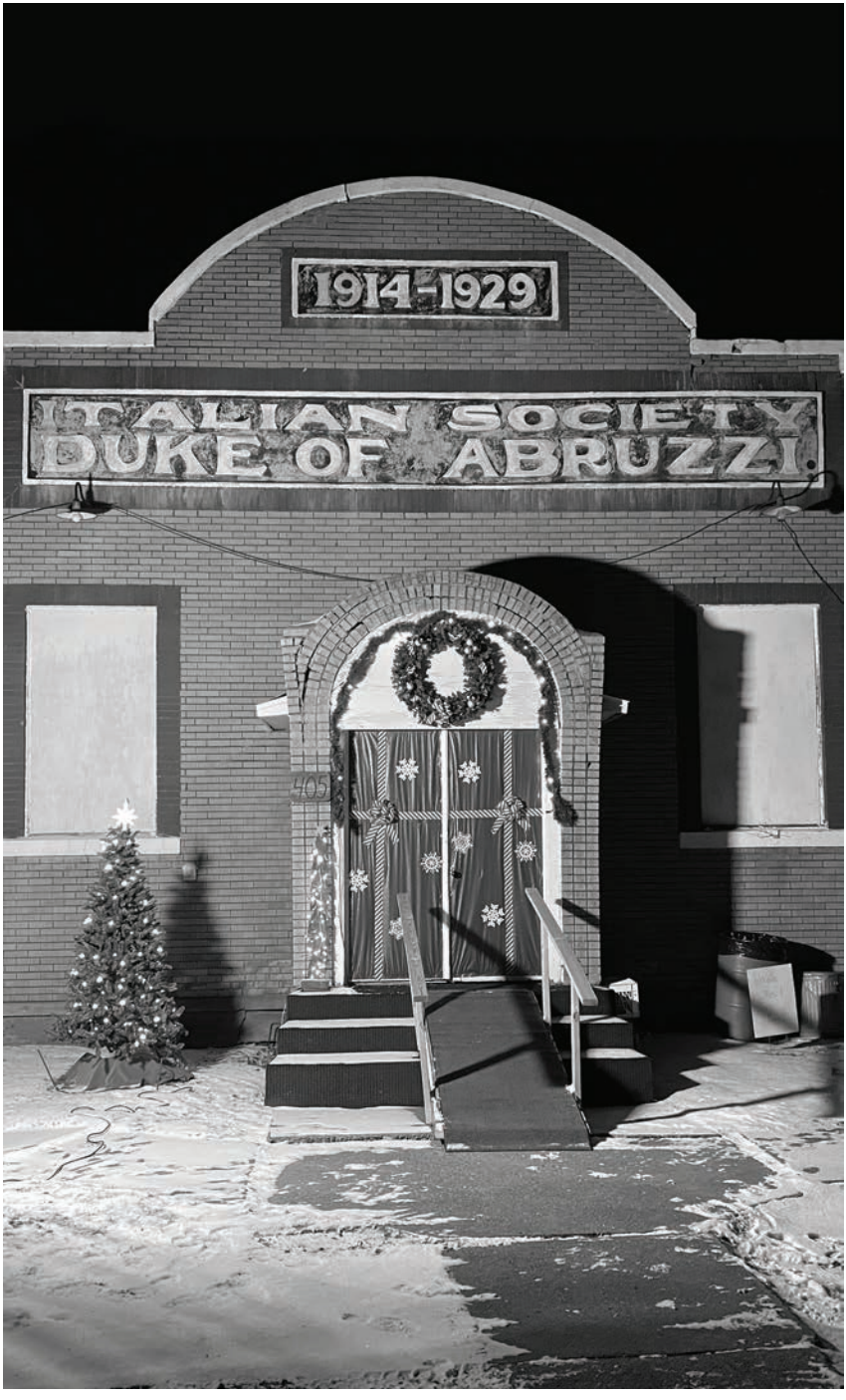
from the voyage, locked to my North. As if it all were
a dream, and Susan's mother never mothered me.

Mother. Or were

you simply wash and a sun licking
the hull of a smoldering boat out of water.

PART THREE

Old-Fashioned Street Dance


1914-1929
ITALIAN SOCIETY
DUKE OF ABRUZZI

Iron Family Vignettes

I. Faith Rodeo

Chipped church spires stab at the fat bellies of dust clouds kicked up from the hooves of painted horses heavy with plump, sequined princesses running incessant circles around barrels hustling for the right time; and heathen kids ride ATVs wild down abandoned train tracks, dead ending at mine shafts, yawned open, screaming for a purpose.

II. Northern Light

Horizon lifts the green from the tree line and swirls it into light straining through the colander of night. Punch drunk with love, we sit on a shore parting one another's bangs among a whorl of leaves on the nape of brush. A deer grooms a fox and a raccoon prunes a black bear. I fumble for words and silver snaps on blue denim trying to unravel the universe on the shimmer of a great lake.

III. Grabbing Markers

How did I miss the colors of a peacock or the march of flower meadows across your journal pages? The thorns of daytime soaps and the obesity of winter, a scrawled calamity of opera. Her hand, hampered by shakes and chafed skin opens reluctantly, alien-like, artichoked. Her birdsong in her hand, Jazmine's melody shatters the pages, a candy wrapper confetti. She has eaten all of it. Hand open like the fenestra of an aperture letting in the light and an etymological clarity, classy and refined. A vibrato of Lifetime movies in the palm. She clenches. She opens. Bam.

IV. Guys and Dolls

Show me a naked Barbie and I will show you the best love I never had, the light through the apple blossoms flashbulb. I close my eyes and tiny fires

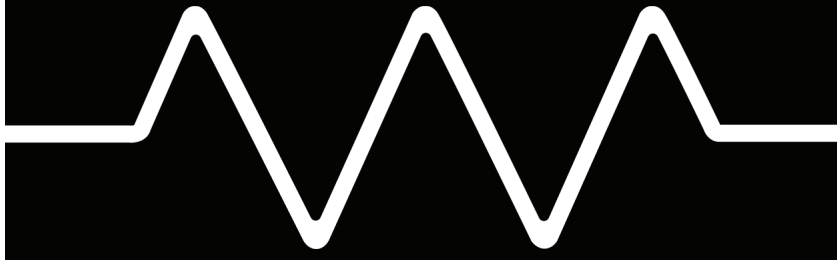
start my pistons. I am running with horses. And when the dust settles, and the spurs' waning twinkle is just a glint in a last wink of sunset rays, we will still be looking for romantic love on pages so temporal, they lift off, just as our fathers did.

V. Clean

Call in the snowmobile cavalry for help and fat clouds, silver with age and regret, to blanket the county with a white so clean that even the ore pits collapsed and sunken bloodshot stoned and opioid witness eyes blink away the redness with involuntary flutters and look clearly to a cold heaven that unites us in an Upper Peninsula quest for warmth and awkward understanding. Our home is river flow clandestine under the ice.

PART FOUR

Death Metal



Pamphlet: Death Poem #1

There is a swoon, a hollow in your throat. Half of your pupil explores the insides of your skull. Your chest labors and your comments too. Having never intended children, each night I sleep next to your deathbed you wonder why I would do such a thing. Why drive diagonally across the country from one lung cancer death to another. Why not just leave you alone. Leave me alone. Everything in this hospice ward is framed in metal. The doors. The windows. The pictures. I look out the door at a picture in the hallway and cold frame after frame is steel feigning wood. Something hard feigning soft, like a forced and staged cry. Is it a stretch? A conceit? Your fair skin and your arm-dancing each night as if your abduction was finally happening and arms first, you lift off into a cone of light. It's really cool to watch. I tell the nurse. She downplays it and tells me it is explained in a pamphlet she hands to me. I will never read that pamphlet because I know it doesn't account for poetry. I will figure this out on my own, unless I find the pamphlet that explains how to deal with the loss of a father who never knew you existed until you found him 27 years after he, 11 years her senior, seduced your mother at 16 under a tree on a cool Michigan night. Read this pamphlet.

The Pits: Death Poem #2

It's all new and pissed outside. Distracted is the streetlight and a star. Something of you and you in the scribble of brackish water squeezed from a rag of a sky or eye, squeezed from the wet hem of a white satin skirt scooted up to the waist. There's a waterway from here all the way to the Iron River. Major themes, and major that. Salute and stand erect. Demand a story. Line it up and add violins. Make Spielberg proud. My estranged dad is dying. And Gramma BJ too. Quick-like in the lungs. My hair and beard grow long. In my sleep talking, my hair cocoons my thinking of *yous guys*. Makes it all safe when there is a war between the rich and poor. Quick and uncomfortable deaths, death rattles and the whole works. Messy. Sluiced. My playlist for tonight's show is bleakness. *Hey everybody, Welcome back to Dr. Chad's Storytelling Time. You're listening to a theme-based radio program, and tonight, Mortality.*

It's beginning. The turn of a late autumn key and drab. My name is Mitchigan. At the rim of the ore pit, a fresh white skirt of snow fence, and I jump into her with a look reserved for possibilities. I should talk to her. Deer. Deer. Their white tails break the shadows of dormant branches. WIKB, across the waves announces opening day of deer season with "Killing Moon." *Fate/ Up against your will/ Through the thick and thin/ He will wait until/ You give yourself to him.* What makes a dirge sexy? We can talk of this amid technology and transistors and a spinning world unleashed. Industry did this. Worked me here, worked the land, the mines, the tobacco fields. Conjurer, the sky is, and will always be the fairest whore of them all in a mirror of water.

Girl Scouts at Hospice: Death Poem #3

I call Copper, the beagle, out of Earl's truck.
I am tired. The Girls Scouts are back with cookies
I can't suck in my stomach for the nurses anymore

at the Hospice ward. I have been driving through
the desert each night down 89A, actually to where 89A
dead ends and then I have to take a left on Willow Creek

and go past the Dells to where the dead end begins.
Death here is different than Michigan. It is dry and
cracked attrition instead of sog and slush consumption.

Disney at Hospice: Death Poem #4

There is a baby here. The nurses keep most of the doors open and I look in each night to see who has died and who is new. Tonight I saw a crib. There was a young man leaning limply over the delicate spindles with a bottle feeding the baby. I will call the baby "she." She is sucking a little, I think. She tries to cry, and I hear one, maybe two subtle whimpers. There are puppies on the fabric that covers the crib mattress. I have a puppy here. My puppy is Copper, just like in Disney's *The Fox and the Hound*. The fox and the hound were great friends when I first saw the cartoon in 1982. They were great friends until they grew up. Then they had to be enemies. And then Copper had the Fox cornered when the bad men of the movie were fox hunting. I was babysitting. I was too young to be babysitting. The parents never should have hired a twelve-year-old. I was crying right there at the single-plex in Riverside Plaza. The girl I was babysitting could talk. Her name was Amanda. She asked why I was crying and I was too young to answer. "I am not," I said. She was wise in her silence. I am going to call the baby in the hospice ward Amanda. I am pretending Amanda can talk now. She is telling everyone about the moon and why things howl. The adults are all speechless except for one, maybe two subtle whimpers.

Bob Dylan and the Celtic Women at Hospice: Death Poem #5

Earl is dancing in the Hospice unit again. It is late evening. I have arrived with Copper the beagle and an armful of CDs. He has Bob Dylan and more Bob Dylan and the Celtic Women. He likes the blonde Irish violin slinging prancing pixie. I prefer Dylan. In a morphine haze he motions for Máiréad. He wins. Copper jumps on the bed and nestles between the gap in Earl's calves. I fumble the disk, push play, and sit in the corner. The violin starts. Earl raises his hands now, delicately, puppet-like, but controlled by a young puppeteer that lacks experience, yet full of passion. The puppeteer knows one day he will be great and for now, that is good enough for him. He is naïve enough to have hope. But as he ages, he improves, but he never improves to greatness. He is simply a good puppeteer. He still has just as much passion as ever, but now he has to keep it hidden for fear of ridicule. In his youth, they would have said, "Look, he will be a great puppeteer." Now they might say, "Look, he thinks he's a great puppeteer." And it is that man—the man with squelched passion and modest skills whose strings are being pulled now. Máiréad lays down her fiddle at the feet of the devil. He should have stuck with Dylan.