

Austen Roye

in all honesty,

this story isn't much of a  
story at all, really, but it'll  
have to do because this  
is all there is.

the characters are important,  
the setting is important, the time  
period is important, but nothing is  
as important as the way in which  
this information is delivered to the  
reader.

here begins the  
mechanics of art  
and therefore the  
end of it.

as for me, I'll stick with what I  
know, the only way I know how.  
“write what you know and nothing  
you don't...” etc. etc. on and on,  
generation to generation.

imagine if that rule wasn't a rule,  
the way this story isn't a story;

professional chefs writing screenplays,  
preachers tending bars, acrobatic lawyers  
flipping through hoops in Saturday-night  
circus tents, window washers taming lions.  
there, that vision alone could disprove the  
write-what-you-know theory. then again,  
anything I say would do the same because  
I know nothing.

also, no matter what I label this or  
anything, story or not, someone will  
say different and someone will agree  
and no one will be right or wrong.  
someone will find meaning where  
there is none, which is  
lucky for me.

ask the ghost poets if they have any  
idea what they really meant, if they  
really knew exactly what they were  
talking about when they wrote long,  
scrawling lines about strawberry stones  
or cobweb bridges. or, leave it as it is  
and depict it as you see fit, because that  
is the point of the pointlessness, the  
meaning of the meaninglessness.

that is why it exists at all.

so, in a way this is a story  
after all;

it's about you and nobody,  
me and somebody else, life  
in its entirety and death in  
its pinhole, everything and  
the emptiness of  
everything.

lucky for me also, the fact  
that a story like this can  
only end in one way...

after all the comatose afternoons  
and bright-eyed evenings, I'm

awake for the first time, the  
drapes are open but window  
closed, no face in that darkness  
like I always imagined, only the  
wall of a similar situation going  
on next door and, if you look at  
an angle to the right, the country  
the way you might think of the  
country in films.

it actually exists, for good  
or ill,

there it is.

awake with a bleeding lip, awake  
with evening sweat and no face in  
the window, not even a single light  
on out there over  
the hills.

the city becomes the field so quickly,  
abruptly, out of nowhere, cars into cattle.  
highways and wildernesses, both exactly  
as you imagine except one becoming  
another without a sign to  
predict it.

not even a veiled ghost bride on  
the stairs like I've mentioned  
before;

I expected her to follow me, make  
some kind of appearance but she's  
not there. I open the door at night  
after the lights go out and look for  
her. I look out the window, out  
across those hills expecting to  
find her standing motionless in  
the open field, my nightmare  
bride who keeps showing up  
in my pieces, unintentionally  
becoming a part of an  
ongoing narrative.

who are you and why do I keep  
looking for you out the window?

why do I keep seeing you descending  
spiral staircases?

why are you standing in every  
window?

stay out of my works, the readers a  
re growing tired of you.

the problem is, you never do anything,  
you just stand there staring behind  
that veil, just looking on and on.

what are you  
looking at?

the segments, the fences, boundaries  
of wisdom, lies of paranoid  
daydreams.

that's enough;

pull the  
veil back.

so it seems

the more I thought about it  
the more I realized it wouldn't show  
if I kept trying to pry it up  
out of me  
so I sat back and thought about  
houses and taxes and groceries  
thought about payday loans  
and pawn shops and elevators  
thought about anything  
but this line  
or this piece  
(if that's what this is)  
thought about the  
hours spent upright  
at this desk  
in this house  
or the other  
and the way things were  
before it was so cluttered  
and heavy with dust  
and notebooks  
the circled stain to my  
right from years of  
so many glasses  
on so many nights  
underweight pale drunk  
always one line away  
from something great  
and now this room  
and heavy imprints  
of ink on top, drawers  
stuffed with scraps  
of this and that  
hoarded away  
for all these months  
serving their own senseless  
purposes  
such as they are or aren't...

either way  
as for today I've unearthed  
something of value  
perhaps not considerable  
value but alive nonetheless  
and it testifies to the  
meaning of the dull  
unmoving moments that  
define the gaps between  
the action  
(if that's what it is)  
and age-old look-back  
remember-whens  
that come in the form of  
stains and dust  
stains and dust  
stains and dust  
to shape  
the  
now.