

## PART II

### The Existence of Sarge

The old man places his hat on the table and  
All three have sat down, the same as if their  
Ancestors had been there first. (Jump cut  
To Sarge): who is all at once by the booth in  
Time to hear the man stricken in years:  
“*Señor, buenas dias.*” On this earth where  
Animals have crawled into men, Sarge is tall  
Among them, well past six-feet, oppressive  
Everywhere, in a white shirt, sleeves rolled  
Up that declare the beefiness of his arms  
Which, if extended, could reach across bodies  
Of water. He stands there like God of the  
Plains country, heavy-footed like a troglodyte,  
And what he says he says with the weight of  
A dozen churches behind him: “You’re in the  
Wrong place, amigo. Come on, let’s get out of  
Here. Vamoose, *Andale.*” The old man, whose  
Skin is second-stage bronze from too much sun  
That’s gotten to it and won’t pull back its  
Color, has feebly searched among the  
Threads of his pocket and extracted the sum  
Of his need. In quietude (etched in raw umber):  
Reliquary hands are endlessly making a  
Wordless offering in a coin purse. Then the  
Very way the tight-wound voice of Sarge  
Echoes through the café walls, out onto the  
Street, and back inside the Holiday Theater  
Where I sit alone in the drop shadows of the  
Back—: “Your money is no good here. Come on,  
Let’s go. You too,” he says to the women,  
Their torment half inside me. And with that:  
He plops the old man’s hat on his head and  
Picks him up by the lapels. *Put the film  
In reverse (I think). Tear out these frames  
From time-motion and color; run the words  
Backward in Sarge’s breath and sever the  
Tendons of his thick arms in bold relief.*

## **On the Subject of Staying Whole**

With orange soda and scoops of popcorn,  
I have taken the vague wisdom of the  
Body to my favorite last row seat at the  
Movie house. It is 1956...and Sarge,  
Keeper of the Lone Star house, Sarge.

Always Sarge, facing down everything  
From the screen. I am fourteen and the  
Muscles come to a stop: From the spell  
Of too much make-believe world that is  
Real. If I yell, "Nooooo!, noooooo!,"  
Would the projectionist stop the last  
Reel of the machine? Would the audience  
Rise up with me to rip down the screen?  
I think now how it went: nothing was

Coming out of me that could choke off  
The sentences of Sarge, a world-beater  
Released into history I would later turn  
Against. A second-skin had come over me

In a shimmer of color and light. I could  
Not break free from the event that began  
To inhibit me—gone was the way to dream

Outside myself. From inside, a small  
Fire began to burn like deep doubt or

A world fallen...I held on. I held on.

## **Stop-Action: Impression**

Of course, the sanctity of the café,  
The just-righteousness of the Place.  
And Sarge, absolute, stressing the plane

Of outward fact, as when the screen  
Gives up the deep-in-air-rooted sound  
Of his voice, the strong ejectives

And glottals; as when he unifies his  
Muscle with the blunt instrument of  
His words with which he tries to purge

His roadside dominion, so that man and  
Women by his side shall be cast out,  
Left unregarded to their own. The eye

Gets insulted by light and the thought  
Descends—: that Sarge, or someone  
Like him, can banish you from this

Hamburger joint; from the rest of your  
Life not yet entered: from this Holiday  
Theater and all sense of place.

### **Fallingrief of Unpleasure**

The eye surrenders to the light and something begins  
To go from you, as if you cannot but leave it: to

Wither on the floor, never to retrieve from darkness  
Like fragments of thought flashing, the slow burn of  
Each frame rises into consciousness with the meaning

Of failed belief. A fallingrief of unpleasure grows  
In you and something, call it the soul, deep is offended  
You want to go mad or die, but turn morose instead.

You lean back hard against your shadow and wish you  
Could dissolve yourself in it, dissolve, fade to black.

### **Without a Prayer at the Holiday Theater**

What the screen had released through the darkness was too  
Much for a single afternoon. Without words, the child  
Began to feel mortal, his mind breaking into awfulness:  
A pulse-beat of dread worked itself down from his

Temples—there was, in his throat, a tightening dry  
Knot and his mouth could not make spit. He longed

For something stronger than anything he was and the  
Thought kept on him: why this was happening and where

He had failed. What had he been if not good all those  
Years, off to Sunday school singing in the church  
Choir? A wine-dark robe hung, brightly, in a  
Practice room to prove it. Had the child been able

To ask nothing more of life than to turn desire into  
words he would have uttered—: *O Saviour, release  
me from this fear; give me cool waters to temper  
the heat of this wound which the back-row darkness  
hides. Send forth your swift light of compassion  
into the places of my woe. Climb down and be seated  
next to me, All-Merciful, bearer of the world's pain  
Increase the faith in me that your deep justice will  
triumph on the screen. I need to see it done. Be  
in me my rock and my redeemer, the Eternal Defender  
of my soul. Mend now my spirit, O God, weaver of the  
good, that I may walk away from here feeling whole.*