

John Lee Hooker's Boogie Chillun

I

Beneath the Dequindre Cut, full of greased weeds & graffiti,
you can see the exact spot where roaming dogs shit,

and lovers, because they're expressions of musical notes & lust,
kiss like lovers kiss, one after another in the front seat

of an old Pontiac, here in the pinguid filth of the Eastern Market
where the slaughter houses and the lamb skin factories

stinking of dead animal carcasses and salt, combine on Orleans
and Monroe Street, so that John Lee can arrive, with a bruised guitar

in a box, the Devil skulking behind him, sometime in 43.⁷
And he can squat in a shack, gone now, long gone in the years

that act like razor blades cutting every shack to bits.
Except for Sam, the guy I talk to, who tells me in busted apart

English because he's from the deep south and he's 73 years old
and his back teeth—the ones that can grab hard on tobacco

and on hard-to-say-words, are old chunks of dead weight.
He can tell me that he still lives in a dusty wooden shack,

just off of St. Aubin, where there's a view of the slaughter house
and John Lee's place, even though it's long gone now.

And even though the woman he slept with, in the old 47' Pontiac,
is nothing now except the particulate of dandelions & black ink.

II

Where it is written that the boogie chillun swing on Hastings Street
John Lee, dark as coal burning in an oven, can sing it,

and you can feel it as heat rising up a fence line, weeds crowding it,
and you can see it as flame bursting out of a rigid chimney stack.

And all the young, festooned girls, portable young things
ready to submit to the anything that guides them like rolling black stars

skipping across the sidewalks of Russell Street & Beaubien,
and then on to Henry's Swing Club, on Orleans, you can see them

now as the gnarled trees & weeds under the Dequindre Cut.
And some graffiti artist down there, a quick moving pulsar of light,

is spray painting the future, because it was always hungry to get here,
and you can go down there, amidst the blown tires & the mattresses

and the old car chassis, and find the boogie chillun, their throats
parched and thirsty from the hot weight of the night, their roots sucking oil.

III

Ladies & Gentleman of the cornucopias of littered trash, of forgotten
auto hulks never mentioned, of slaughtered animals glazed in blood,

of the wantonness of soiled floors where knife blades divide ribs,
I want to tell you of the boogie chillun, John Lee's kin, yours & mine,

because they are the ones born in music and the ones lost in light,
and they are the ones whose voices go on singing in the low wind

that's wandering like a melody under the Alfred Street Bridge, where Sam's
walking this morning, his mouth full of chewing tobacco and blues,

and I am walking there with him, one of the free ones never a part
of the 1943 riots that slaughtered this town, like a lamb's neck.

And we're getting high on the light that's slanted like a guitar string
through the wreckage of a viaduct, he & I, and we're not alone.

We're never never alone, he shouts out at no one, we're never alone,
our roots and toots live inside the ashes and underneath the weeds,

and he throws his arms up in arrivals & in cataclysmic gestures, and
in soiled lathered sweat; we're never alone, he shouts out to no one, *never alone*.