Mrs. Ramsay's Knee
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1. Icepicks

Cleaning out your father’s tool shed we discover his meat hooks in wood boxes among broken saw blades, the empty arc of a hacksaw, huge ice-tongs you remember (blue blocks of ice hauled in every morning), dull icepicks so large we can’t figure what they are until you remember his white shirt and taut shoulders, the white nails of his clenched hand like Abraham’s, the ritual jabbing and chipping clean ice for the cases. You grew up spoiled by red beefsteaks piled from the freezers, barrels of red snapper steaks, white fish flesh beautiful as egret feathers—meat cut so deftly the place was practically bloodless, the ice underneath always edible. And so they are icepicks, rusting in the humid heat of this city. We detect no bloodstains on wood handles, not even a thumbprint. White enameled meat trays hang on nails over our heads. You remember eating icicles in midsummer.

2. Night Shift

Into your eight-hour, day-night shift of tracks, railyard, private world of steel, I come among slow rumbling loads of moving cars. I know where you are. Weak station lights diffuse. Fifty yards into the void, your face is fixed, impassive under that billed hat. You contemplate cargo: trains of sugar to New York, grain to Florida. Inside the lantern’s circled light, you walk the track, swinging glare scattered starward. Listen, if you cannot see: the switchman’s shout, the distant clang of coupling cars, the jolt, the hiss of brakes released. Your heavy shoes crunch gravel, kick a loose tie. You wait. Slowly up and down, your lantern moves, a clear signal I never understood.