

# john mccarthy

## WHAT I MEAN WHEN I SAY *I DON'T BOX ANYMORE*

I'm thinking of last summer, having played Russian roulette with the six-shot revolver Matt stole from his grandfather's closet.

The two of us each taking one turn, spinning and pulling. Each of us exhaling after the click. Neither of us wanted to die, but we were young

and needed someone to die, so we could feel guilty and learn how it feels to carry that guilt. We pressed the barrel between our teeth and bit the steel.

We quoted our favorite lines wrong on purpose before pulling the trigger — *Everything's beautiful. Everything hurts.* It was like spinning a globe and quickly

pressing your finger down somewhere on land or over water and if your finger hits water you spin again — but we didn't spin again

because our mothers were asleep at home in small beds dreaming of us or not dreaming of us and what if the hammer had punched the bullet —

then nothing? We were left with the guilt of being lucky and somewhere a clock went on spinning and pulling itself into a new day that kept turning

brighter and begging of me something I had to admit — that risking my body would not stop the world from ruining my body, or stop

my mother from forgetting to live. When I came home smelling of sweat and burning proof, I walked into my mother's room. The drugs had her

sleeping. Her mouth was open and drool caked her lips. I said something like *I know why you want to die* and I kissed her on the forehead

while she went on sleeping, dreaming of me or not dreaming of me. I walked to the garage to practice the hitting I knew how to do

and the hitting I knew how to take. Under the hum of a 40watt bulb, I imbedded the cracks of a heavy bag's dry leather with knuckled salt

and this time I didn't wrap my fists with tape or gloves. When I hit the heavy bag hard enough, my blood split open, the chain squeaked

and the bag spun around slightly on its hook. I hit the bag until I stopped.