

We stare, content

Clouds hang low and white,
dad's tees on the line in back
We can't see the green and brown hills across the lake

Our cove is smoky and still
Misty white vapor dances, a nomad last to go
We can't see past them to the hills

The wind comes up strong and steady,
and chases the clouds east and high, leaving
twisted laundry for mom to unravel

As the sky settles on sun, we squint
as clouds scatter soft and high, we know
our days on the shore will be fair

and we stand in our rough leather boots,
as dew comes up through our soles,
and we stare, content, past the water's soft chaos to
the green and brown hills

I had it backwards

The older neighbor girl was sunbathing,
Farrah feathers and a white bikini
the boys nicknamed
Peekaboo.

William lived next door.
That day, a squat, squeaky-voiced
Houdini, tied up, delightfully close to
stealing the sunbather's heart with
an astonishing escape.

Wrists and ankles shackled with stinky, oiled rope
ransomed from his father's trunk,
William fell down the treacherous backstairs, on most days
his last steps to the windy tantrums of Everest's summit.

Sweaty ass peeking, two halves of
a honeydew planted on
scratchy, noisy hospital paper,
William held his broken arm, pain, pulsing agony
driving him to a pledge, a safe path.

"I will never imagine anything again."

No more racing the curves of Monza or
exploring the depths of red Martian craters.
No last try to jump his sky-blue Sting-Ray
over barbwire and beam into
Switzerland like Steve McQueen.

William went cold turkey, overnight turning into a wreck
chewing Juicy Fruit by the pack, tortured by
the *Jetsons*, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, and Sunday School.
His middle school progress stalled and
he pushed it slowly to the shoulder, hazards blinking
dimly, more dimly until they threw up their small, orange hands and
he was left on his own.

In William's spring evaluation, Mrs. Chips wrote in the perfect D'Nealian of a seventh-grade teacher that he was "...a smart boy who had an almost visible cap on his willingness to plan, create, or dream."

When William read it, he was overjoyed:
Progress.

William entered high school and quickly thumbed his nose at the possibilities in everything from physics to C.S. Lewis, instead continuing to live out the strange, terrible vow that left him intellectually and socially limp.

Gathered in the boys' room and at lunch, his classmates said there was something missing from William, four channels of TV after cable had come. As he received his diploma, they yelled, "Hey, Rabbit Ears!" He had no clue.

He enrolled in a second-rate Iowa college for 14 credit hours of gym class. Across the faded asphalt of College Avenue from campus was the Tall Corn Tavern: humid, loud, always packed nozzle to fill spout.

William leaned on the bar waving two dollars like he was betting on a cockfight. He turned with his pint, but retreated instantly, a freight train of sorority girls coming up the aisle, making a fast run for the Midwestern, the bar down the block.

The tracks ahead clogged, the girl at the train's end slowed. Overwhelmed by her remarkable beauty, blue eyes, and bright teeth, his thoughts darted, impulsive, immature birds, hollow legs stretching, stretching towards a place to land together. And when they found it: *Snap*. I had it backwards.

“Don’t go with them. Have a beer with me.”

The train lurched towards the door.
She was the last railroader, reaching back,
raising, lowering, raising her lantern, turned to
its green lenses, above her gorgeous brunette hair:
Proceed. Proceed. Proceed.

She yelled, one hand at her mouth, over the jukebox and
drunken babble.

“No, you follow me.”

He looked at his feet.
It was almost too late when
he stepped towards her, offered his arm, and
guided her to the evening rush on
the sidewalk along Eighth Avenue.

Outside, the crowds were spilling from the theaters
in the long city blocks to the east.

On fire's breath

I.

Pink fingers,
cold clutching sticks,
bark grimy smeared
with the guts
of marshmallows
I held over
short flames,
our faces perfect
orange in the glow,
smoke rising slow

II.

As gusts pushed
the gray cold lake
over slumped, tired shores,
lonely in the sound,
Dad,
our bamboo rakes,
the fall wind
that beats the water white,
clearing faded confetti
to the fire and its smoke

III.

When biting rain
rolled out
our farm lane green
under fog and wind
that blew smoke
from a brush pile
across the pasture
into our woods,
a lithe intruder,

quiet sneaking
through the baring oaks

IV.

Like lost memories,
flakes of ash
carried up and away
on fire's breath,
leaving pale remains:
a kid, rakes,
the wind's gray sting,
a steady sound,
Dad,
scratching the hard ground,
pulling, pulling the brittle leaves