

Summer Rain

There's a small tract of woods at the north end of the park, and a small patch of dirt by the stream that a small group of boys claimed as their own this summer. They talk about girls, shoot at bottles, light newspapers on fire. They're all local boys; one of them is very quiet.

Today he stands in a sky blue t-shirt, hands caked with dirt.

He watches as the other boys pass around a handgun. One of them had taken it from his father's collection.

My Dad won't even notice.

They make targets of a gallery of bottles stacked colorfully against the hillside. Each shot dissolves into the buzzing canopy surrounding them. Beyond that, in pink silence, the burnt out summer afternoon yawns and stretches itself out over the town, streets, farms, houses, trailers, the schoolyard.

It's hot out. He has taken ten turns already. He's a real good shot but he's late for supper.

The boys hide the gun, along with a dozen or so cardboard boxes full of .357-inch diameter rounds beneath a big boulder that rests unbalanced by the shore.

The boy has no appetite.

He turns to leave with his friends, wishing there were somewhere else to go. He yawns, reaching nervously upward, revealing bruises striped

naked across lower side of his stomach. Lines of black, purple, blue, sickly-yellow, crisscrossed and map-like.

Now, a breath of wind collides with branches above. His eyes rise knowingly. Large dark clouds are gathering at the southern edge of the pink summer afternoon sky.

The boy turns right off of Saul Street, muggy air in his face, bicycle gears clicking. The trees on the horizon have become silhouetted by rolling thunderclouds. The air restless and turbulent, as if the atmosphere itself were slowly being vacuumed away from some above place.

He enters through the front gate, head feeling light, cars parked along the curb, inexorably hot, dusty. He drops his bike just past the fence and crosses the cobblestone path towards a broken down beige house. Maybe he's not back yet.

The boy hardly makes it onto the patio before realizing that he is back.

His stomach floats a little and there is anger. Vast, but distant. A swirling galaxy coming into focus at the blurred edges of his own depth-of-field. And as he steps onto a floor covered in spilled garbage and empty beer cans it grows nearer.

A figure appears in the doorway.

You're late, again.

The feeling takes shape. Swirling, strange, and overwhelming. The Father is swaying now between the two posts of the doorframe.

Nothing to say for yourself?

The boy stands. His body suddenly electric and pulsing as memories surface. The father holds a thin wire clothes hanger in hand. Latticed, lengthened and familiar. He takes a step towards the boy and the boy levels his eyes something indescribable. Choking on words.

You, leave him out of it!

A voice erupts suddenly from the living room and a T.V remote barely misses the father's head. Exploding plastic bits and batteries rain from the wall behind.

The father reels backward, grasping at a chair, crashing with a thud on the ground as the chair folds over him. He lets out an exhausted groan and his head falls slowly clockwise.

It's not his fault I married a mean, bitter, little, man. The mother mutters, turning away, stumbling, a bit back, into the living room to sit adjacent her white wine.

The boy is already out the door.

Something is stirring deeply at the sky. The dark clouds are completely overhead now. Lighting flashing like paparazzi behind their curtains. The boy pedals hard through wet air and the clouds swirl faster, new rage crackling wild across his mind. The atmosphere is welled-up and unearthly and a whole field of corn dances weightless to his right.

He arrives at the spot by the stream. The wind is sweeping down, combing wet fingers through dusty summer leaves. He is in a void, kneeling near the boulder.

At first he felt alive, but now feels untethered. There's no room left to file away his tumult— Hanging a hurricane in a coat closet. He hasn't either the proclivity to speak it; a tool never sharpened. A man deals with his problems in a certain way, and so forth, and so he awaits the opening of the sky. Fingers closing around cold metal.

It fell heavy. Down pouring across pavement, town, streets, farms, houses, trailers, the schoolyard. The whole sprawl opened to receive and when the rain finally stopped, and the sun peaked through the clouds, the boy was no longer there. Where he knelt before was just a wisp of steam-heat rising from a puddle in the earth. And in front of that broken down beige house the cars were clean and new.

