

## Gordon Parks Taking Pictures

The first time I double exposed  
all but one. The women  
in dresses, sitting on couches  
holding their bodies weightless  
the way well dressed women do.  
In my excitement I saw  
too much for one frame.  
We develop in slower fashion  
like a bus ride  
from Alabama to Boston  
It requires almost  
still photography to capture  
the ridge of division  
between ones who sign things  
and ones who serve drinks.  
We can evolve into movies  
hard frame blurring into hard frame.  
I will turn my lenses into liquid  
folded over like Dali's clocks.  
I will lead the cinematographer  
toward a New York summer.  
A black man in flip flops  
no longer causes  
the grip of a handbag  
the shifting of weight.

Gordon Parks' Women

French nuns  
hats like wings  
one behind another  
like an airport runway  
to another dimension

The nuns of Atchison  
like black spires walking  
like black pearls tied together  
with the tiny white knots  
of prayer book pages

A single Sister in Italy  
rosary tied to waist  
bags in one hand  
her other  
she studies like a palm reader  
over the tablecloth of her chest

A wife in Brazil  
delicate white lace  
thrown over the food  
in the basket on her head  
her neck strong  
her forehead smooth  
her hand gripped

At a funeral  
one hand holds a Bible  
a rose on its open pages  
the other palm open to earth  
a red rose drops with gravity  
onto unseen ground

The old women  
the shoppers in Paris  
the matching bag and umbrella  
the clutch, beret and broach  
the baguettes

The Italian sitting on a country chair  
enormous calves clothed  
in grey hosiery  
a woman widened by time  
all the way down to her feet

Mrs. Jefferson  
old woman with a name  
wooden chair  
cane  
jaw like granite  
hair a tangible cloud

Mothers  
An isolated lane  
in country Kansas  
child under her hand  
Canada  
boy tall as his mother's  
backside looking terrified  
in his striped shirt and black shorts  
next to her white pumps

Black button shoes  
tidy boots  
next to a tidy window  
framing a tidy wintertime tree

Ancient hands  
metacarpals round as plums  
distal-est joints clubbed  
from lack of oxygen  
A life can live it seems  
even in the absence  
of necessities

If Gordon Parks Had Talked to Ken Lunt About the String Theory of Quantum  
Physics Circa 2007

Strings can be two things at once.  
They can sit like a point or wrap  
around space. They can measure  
special pairs of unsimilar shapes—  
one complicated.  
one simple.  
And the circus tent  
of the subatomic world  
finds them physically equivalent.

Perhaps you and I were one  
of those special pairs. I think  
strings sitting on and looping  
around our pasts, like a fishing net  
on the Marmaton  
must have been pulling for years  
and finally cinched us together  
toward the end. Your birth  
two days before my twenty-second.  
Our homes—Your Kansas. My everywhere.  
Our war zones—Your Korea. My America.

And in what sounds like a fish story  
too heavy for this net of strings  
they would find us...the same.  
Forgiveness, what a fish must feel when he's plucked  
from the net and the hook is gentled from his mouth.  
And he's put back into his water.  
The cemetery you tidied for my mother.  
The honorary high school diploma.  
The walking path you carved through the limestone  
for me to come home.  
Home to Fort Scott  
where you live and where I lie.

## A Belated High School Diploma

He holds it like an old love letter  
close to his chest  
against the flannel shirt  
he probably doesn't wear outside  
his apartment  
the piece of hometown  
we all have hanging on the back  
of the bathroom door  
If you were to dissect his face  
in the way of Fort Scott High School  
science classes he never got to take  
his eyes are the look of the prodigal's father  
His white mustache sits above a mouth  
turned up just enough to resemble  
a fishing boat  
filled with a few close friends

## On The Meeting of Old Men

What if all of this already happened  
What if this is me  
binge watching my life  
What if even this old body  
was always just a metaphor  
a staged photograph  
an illusion of separate colors  
What if I've met you so many times  
in so many lives  
that these easy conversations  
only look like something strange  
and special to people  
peeking in from other battles  
Men know how to die  
in each other's company  
Young men teach each other  
to shave and tie ties  
Old men try to untie  
the knots in the stories  
we've told about each other