

Veteran's Park

I walked there at daybreak
to view the semi-colossal bronze
of a young ensign, bereft, his rifle
capped with another's helmet.
May thirty-first. This was once
observed as Decoration Day
but today there are no starry pennants
or tri-colored sashes pinned across
men and women who rise from folding
chairs to gingerly salute. This place is empty,
almost. A teenager is learning to drive.
Sparrows make their ablutions in the sand.
And there. My dead father, standing away,
teeth and glasses restored since I saw him last.
But it's someone else, of course,
some other elder serviceman
yet to be taken Over There.

Bicycle parts and a broken cement
culvert lay in the creek—mortar and caisson.
Struck by it's lanyard, a flag pole is ringing.
Somewhere a lawnmower idles—
my father's song—the droning made dulcet
by distance and wind and how I like to imagine
it's the sound made by the morning star.

This Week

Our daughter lost her incisor.
It rattled in the plastic bite-size
treasure chest her school supplies.

Baptists examine their thirty
foot steeple taken down
for repair. It rests on its side
across the parking lot.

Instead of sleeping on it
she buried her tooth in the yard.
Soiled fingernails, a red gap
between thorn canines,
like a novice vampire
interring a fang.

Without it's mitre, the house
of God resembles any other
middle class dwelling.
On the church roof, spotlights
hit a white spire of moths.

My wife found only sleeping hands
tucked under the pillow.
Regardless, the tooth fairy left a dollar.

After work I drive
past the church.
Sideways, the steeple
points the way home.

The Game

The drill team built a half-time prop,
some sort of rickety fuselage parked
in front of *Wildcats* spelled with Solo
cups pushed into chain link fence.
Wind carries the clatter of drum practice
across the street to this coffee house
buzzing with after-school girls.

A petite scholar pouts for a boy on her laptop,
hands cupping her au lait, taking the brew
like a philter. Bedheads peruse an art book
trying hard to be unimpressed by 1000 nudes.
When an unfamiliar classmate enters
they turn but pretend they don't see her,
even though they are dying to be noticed.

There is a father sitting with his very little girl
who's eager to greet them all but it's time
to leave for the game. As he helps put on her coat
he recites, with each button, an oracle
assuring his daughter that every closure
will bring something unexpected and new:

a gift

a ghost

a friend

a foe

a letter to come

a journey to go

Green Ghost

Her hand made spontaneous scribble
of things to come. On the grocery list
our grandmother wrote *no not him*
not the one. Moments later Oswald
shot the president.

She miscarried seven times.
She claimed their spirits awoke
and could be heard after dark.

At dusk she smelled cigarettes,
said the revenant of a smoking paramour
had come to her kitchen window.

She once pursued a sad infatuation
to Mexico, returned with a photo
of the catholic priest and a devil mask
she hung above her bed.

She put grandchildren in the guest bed
to sleep but we stayed awake to play
the board game stored underneath.
The glowing phantom spinner pointed
it's finger at whoever had a turn but
we never learned to play. We just watched
Green Ghost spin phosphorescent
then jumped into bed before our grandmother
looked in, dabbing her red-rimmed eyes,
muttering about missing pieces,
the lack of rules and small voices
in the night.

December 13th

She wears a pair of pink strap-on
marabou wings and whatever she's staring at
is something most of us hope we never see.

I recognize her from Cora street's wildflower
median. She knelt there for days last summer
and announced *Do Not Mow* –

repeating the posted phrase as if to teach
a bird to talk. She looks like she grew up
from a fifth grade classmate I remember,

one who skipped cracks to save her mothers
back, a girl with boy's glasses and breasts
too soon. Shoppers skirt the sidewalk

where she stands this evening in a stained
white formal, a store window at her back
as if she's part of the display. Her perpetual grin

reminds me why mannequin smiles show no teeth.
This demented bridesmaid shuffles into the street
where her damp hair gleams red with Christmas light

and she becomes someone else. A serene ingenue,
ecstatic in her ordeal – Saint Lucy, unaware
she has been crowned and the crown is fire.