

Love and Waffle Fries

We rehearse *The Tempest*,
conjure fresh magic
from five hundred year old prose.
Reciting our lines into a mantra,
more than mere meter and verse,
an ancient incantation,
a transmutation of flesh—
we *are* Miranda and Ferdinand.
Two sparks fanned into an inferno,
hormones racing at light speed,
devouring the last of childhood,
unstoppable.

You are the girl with a half pulled
zipper on her bedroom ceiling.
One side of the painting a gold
stripe running from the edge of the wall
to the center of the room, a detailed
rendition. From here the mural
opens to reveal a wedge of jet-black
sky filled with glow-in-the-dark planets,
whirling galaxies, shooting stars.
As with most art, and with all girls,

I'm not sure what to think.
The mural poses several questions,
although for a teenage boy,
only one question matters—
is that zipper half open?

Nick's

I

Thick blue tobacco-air
A last game break cracks,
squeaking chalk pivots
on custom pool sticks.

stripe and solid scatter,
race for soft edges, batter
each other's tangents,
bump cushion,
slow-roll
stop.

One player props against a stool,
re-lights a Marlboro.

Another coolly stalks the green slate field,
calling his next best shot.

In a corner, a couple seeks distance.
She sits erect listening, staring
at the floor. He sidles into her gaze, reaching
for her shoulder, she jerks away— two hearts
in a Gordian knot.

Co-eds help a birthday friend giggle home.
Their waitress fills a tray with empty bottles,
(one stuffed with a carefully peeled label),
wipes her once white rag across the tabletop,
pockets the ten—hard-won milk-money.

A Miller man sits at the bar sweet-talking
the dirty ash tray, picks at a half-dozen cold
hot wings. Across the thin room, a plain woman
locks his copper eyes—smiles him over

for a few quick shots. He holds open
her black leather coat—
they trickle toward the side door.

Santana wails, in stereo:
... tryin' to make a devil out of me.

II

Under a fog comforter
Good mornings are exchanged.
In half-tone light, my fingers grope
a plastic coffee spoon, double-sweeten instant.

Nothing is promised, nor expected.
You put on a good wife coat;
I fasten an out-of-town tie, snick the door locked.

Outside—two damp song birds tentatively call mates.
I watch your taillights blush gray mist.

A neon sign buzzes: *Vacancy*

Double Exposure

Dad rattles into the family room,
groans down in his big yellow chair.
Trying to focus warped vision on the album,
he puzzles over faces. I speak slowly:

Our first time canoeing through Bull Sluice—
we broke a paddle, nearly wrapped the boat,
rammed the bank, snagged roots.
We both nurse an ice-cold Murphy's stout.
Dad, all smiles, is pointing to his beer, I drip dry
in a spring sun that set almost forty years ago.

I hear that river,
smell fresh clean wild.
A camera flash:
I'm an old man in a new photograph.