

FUNERAL GAMES

M. P. JONES IV

Imagine you were still
here, that you never left
your wife and your children
in the night, to cross eight
states for as many years.
Your daughter gallops onward
like a charioteer, but at the lake's
edge, your sons are still building
the fire, watching the bobber
drift, suspended between
the whiskey-dark surface and stiff
autumn air. They are boxing
your ears where you lie
as still as an old photograph,
scar visible on your forehead,
bottle spilled beside
the ring of rocks, draining
the dregs for that contest
already won. You told me
you were happiest at sixteen,
when the girls too good
to speak to you at school
would open their windows

slowly in the clean darkness.
This, too, will smolder
until morning comes
and I shake this miserable
dream, borrowed like a leaky
Jon boat from some silent
semaphore, keys to a house
long gone, locks changed,
the stucco now a shade
of robin's egg. The neighbors
moved and left behind
no forwarding address.

A GENEALOGY OF SCIENCE

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- 1917: An American boy and a German boy stare at one another in a French trench for a full minute behind a Colt New Service and a Luger. Each marvels at how close a likeness the other bears to his own visage, like a mirror image. One shoots.
- 1925: She watches the shadows swim under the door as her impatient husband paces the hospital corridor.
- 1936: A man films the last known Tasmanian tiger walking back and forth between the cage walls just before it disappears.
- 1952: A soldier's hat falls as he bends to avoid seeing his superior. Polished boots sound like hoof-clatter on cobblestones as he slams the brothel door.
- 1970: In a soybean field in middle Georgia, the crowd roars. Not far away, a pregnant girl at a roadside peach stand says to a Strychnine-panicked boy, "I cannot help you; the lines are down," as he stumbles into the darkness.

- 1976: A red telephone is ringing in the early light. She cannot hear it. She studies the light on the countertop, not wondering who waits at the other end of the line, for whom it rings.
- 1987: A girl waits in a hotel room purchased on her father's credit card for a boy who said, "I ache for you."
- 1993: A man holds his first-born by the legs out the window-frame of an incomplete second-story addition.
- 1997: A young man drives through the night, perhaps in Arizona, perhaps nowhere at all, until he comes upon a waterless sea of solid glass. Nobody believes him.
- 2000: The neighbor boy soaks toads in gasoline to watch them move through the dark like shooting stars.
- 2004: Christmas Eve, the tire of an overturned car spins in a ditch where two boys sit staring at a patch of morning sun shining through the pines.
- 2005: Midnight in the Mother's Day darkness: the telephone rings.
- 2012: A young man cuts his own right hand off with a chainsaw. After, he cannot explain.
- 2013: Forgotten candles in the bathroom resemble green moonlight where two lay naked in the dark.
- Five (A.M.): A boy and a girl watch the last Tasmanian tiger pace back and forth on a bright screen. No sound.