

FISH TALE

My brother died with a trunk full of fish

and beer bottles crashing together—
in the Mother's Day darkness—

I am endlessly returning

as if to a worn photograph,
a lure drifting along the lake's rim
in Vermont,
a place I've never seen, and so

can only imagine some dim shore growing certain
in torn threads of afternoon light.

I go back to those improbable stories

he would tell, eyes alight with the consuming
fire of beer and bourbon,

like the one where he is driving through the desert
all night,
just driving through the sand, until finally he stops
at noon—perhaps in Arizona,
perhaps nowhere at all—

M. P. JONES IV

on a waterless sea of solid glass,
supposedly the wake of some explosives test.

Walking over the burnt sand-lake's surface, breaking apart
frozen waves and currents
beneath his boots,
crumbling like a hopeless metaphor for certainty.

I listen as he wavers—wanting only to fix some narrative
over the near end—

recounting as his slurring sways,
circling to the moment just before the hooks are set,

before the surface quivers,
the bottles break,
and everything is finished.

And everything *is* finished:
the bottles break
before the surface quivers,

circling to the moment just before the hooks are set,
recounting as his slurring sways

over the near end,

I listen as he wavers, wanting only to fix some narrative.

Crumbling. Like some hopeless metaphor for certainty,
beneath his boots,

frozen waves and currents.

Walking over the burnt sand-lake's surface, breaking apart—
supposedly the wake of some explosives test—

on a waterless sea of solid glass.

Perhaps nowhere at all

at noon, perhaps in Arizona,
just driving through the sand, until finally he stops
all night.

Like the one where he is driving through the desert
fire of beer and bourbon.

He would tell, eyes alight with the consuming.

I go back to those improbable stories
in torn threads of afternoon light,

can only imagine some dim shore growing certain—
a place I've never seen—and so,

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and beer bottles crashing together.

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TO THE LIQUOR STORE WITH HAYDEN CARRUTH

M. P. JONES IV

Even at your age, you are as thirsty
as Li Po at sunset, picturing endless herons
with the lake's *orange tongues leaping in the corner*,

so we make way, with *the winter of illness ending*,
down main street,
suffering through what was left

of that pitiful hangover, the dreadful *crescent tipped beyond*
the dark tree-burst of morning. The Oldsmobile

that burns oil and rocks violently
like a *cat that starts to throw up*,
back and forth, *convulsing and gagging*—

you think *Chicago was bleak, God knows*,
but sweet, well, what is this cow town,
anonymous as its barren azaleas,

before the students crawl out from beneath
their drowsy squalor? Hayden, you wince
a devil grin as we take the corner sharply—
past where *Omar and Tu Fu were drinking vodka*

*and warm beer—eyes glowing hellfire, you struggle
like Ahab with the broken heater's knob.*

Coins drip from your pockets like coils of wire, the bloom
of *that empty treble roll* unfurling on the seasick floorboard
as you growl *I can afford awful. But, at least I can*
afford it and mumble something about
the five stages of death as we slide into the parking space.

Italicized words are from Carruth's Scrambled Eggs & Whiskey.

SWAILING

DEVIN LATHAM

The poets tell me I'm in fire season. I build fires in the night, at daybreak, at noon. I like to sweat. I'd sweat out every ounce of liquid in my body given the chance. I've got fire in my thighs, in my mouth, in my belly. I lie on my back, on my knees, on my face and burn until I'm put out. I'd burn myself up if I could.

Fifty acres of woods and a long overgrown farm sat in Bibb County, Alabama with no company but a train that ran by and a great-grandson who piddled around for answers. Jim called this land the Old Place.

The brush pile sat at the edge of a clearing beside the old house Jim's great-grandparents had lived in. The house leaned forward like it'd been waiting on somebody to

come home too long. The front door rested swung open against the outside wood wall. Most of the windowpanes were broken, but the porch still stood and wrapped around the old house.

I wanted to burn the brush pile. Adding to it, I drug saplings from under the surrounding woods while Jim shouldered the fallen trunks of sweetgums and pines. We made the pile twenty feet tall and forty feet around. There was an old mattress halfway down buried beneath branches—the floral fabric peaked through. Someone had dumped it by the gate. I wanted to burn it, too.

Jim poured diesel around the edges to make it all catch. He threw in a lit chunk of kindling, and the dry wood caught with a quick roar, burning tall and toxic.