

Discharge

Niccolo Bechtler

Resica Falls Scout Reservation, East Stroudsburg, PA

How can you sleep so soundly
on this cot's stiff canvas?

Must be the sounds of owls,

deer and their small noses in the brush.
The platform tent is wet with morning dew,

I pull the kerchief around my neck.

The hem of my shorts soaks mildew
and I sense a distance from home.

Our laughter here is absolute, but I wish

to spiral outward, find the target, place
a quarter on the paper bullseye
to gauge my grouping.

We lie on our bellies to shoot rifles.

Being left-handed, you eject hot brass and smoke
into your elbow's crook
each time you pop the bolt.

The sky is low and gray over the swingset
and I move as if to reach it. Swinging higher,
ever closer, boot-toes grazing
the humidity as I pump past horizontal
and the chains go slack and catch me.

Your knife is springloaded, automatic,
 illegal in some states. How you fly
 off the swing, over the dirty puddle

containing the atmosphere in negative.

 You grunt on landing, sit back,
face like a full moon, stunned
as the stain emanates outward:

You lift your shorts
to dislodge the blade from your thigh.

In the woods at night the silence
is sharp. Not even the owls

can save me. Here in the tent, too is soundless.

 Just the breath's pulse, the rush of blood,
 the subtle changes in pressure,
and the sick green creep of exuberance.

Gravity

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that which attaches me to the concrete
(gravelly wide-spaced tiled) where 46th becomes
Market as the sun rolls into eyeline
flings the wheels of my bicycle ever faster

as the grade raises the hill gets lower
toward waterlevel around the old shipyards
a negative slope depending on my perspective
on the earth's gradual inversion toward night

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drat fog and moonless the world upside down
turns light to dark: racket censor
unlamped Market reversed and vertiginous
it'd follow the possibility of floating away

yet the center is constant I remind
myself deep beneath road grout eroded
the white hot core of activity draws an absolute down
and I am on its dark side scrambling my way back up

Your grandfather, as a child

Niccolo Bechtler

I.

ate sardines from the tin most days

slept in the same room as his five brothers

learned to make a baseball from rags and string

contracted tetanus from a nail in the firepit

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did not have to abandon school to shine shoes

never watched his father succumb to alcoholism

heard God command him to become a doctor

attended summer camp with the Boy Scouts

-

burned his arm on a bucket of ashes in the alley

tried to bribe his teacher with a box of chocolates

drilled with rubber-band guns when the war came

quit playing the violin and learned to regret it

II.

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