

Fall 1984

Margins

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Recommended Citation

Smith, J. D. (1984) "Margins," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 23 , Article 15.

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Margins

The park's old men play their checkers
under a sun imported from the Mediterranean
and never sweat in their flannel shirts—
their flesh, shrunk close to the bone,
quickly loses heat.

They pinch off gobs of Red Man,
ruminate before each move.

One wins now and then;
both would like more pieces,
a bigger board, a longer game.

One may stop to spit and tell a story,
now bigger than what it recalls—
the last bear in these parts,
flush days before the Crash,
limbs lost in the tractor plant.

At six they go home to wives or memories,
dead or dying in various degrees,
a shot of bourbon out of Social Security,
papers and TV.

After the anthem they sleep a few light hours,
again wearing new spats and gold cufflinks,
living high on margins.