Summer 1992

Driving into Town

Rodney Jones
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Coming down Sand Mountain, many things moved with me in the car, 
the anger jarred from you, 
A staticky Jonathan Winters tape, the Best of the Rolling Stones, 
And then I saw them, hatless, ungoverned, decamping from the church, 
a thread that flared to rope 
And sprawled across the little lawn and knotted under trees: 
bald and freshly permed, 
Many with dark coats and red ties or matching purses and shoes, 
Innocuous bigots with their retinues of fledgling weightlifters, 
maiden aunts of philosophy students, 
Ex-coaches of insurance salesmen and guidance counselors, 
Architects dreaming the aesthetics of Alabama Savings & Loans, 
great ponderous femme-fatales 
Trailing the mountainous sexual wonder of sixteen-year-old boys.

There was just that instant there, I boiled them in one glimpse 
and thought they’d maybe caucused 
For a wedding or a death, or did they love the Lord so much 
they’d come 
On Sunday, Wednesday, and now again on Friday afternoon, 
Perhaps to prove their faith with diamondbacks or strychnine? 
And some of these, too, 
I guessed, had formed the mob I’d seen Saturday two weeks ago 
that looked so magisterial, stentorian, Greek,
As it uncoiled in a stark festoon of white sheets and dunce’s peaks toward some vitriolic
Welder’s speech against Earl Warren, Satan, the communists, the niggers, and the Jews:
Distinguish them singly or mark them in the curve where they began to blur
And fade along the piedmont of fescue, anguses, and machines.

Another mile of farms, the hills returned to hills, we passed a sorghum mill, a spotted mule
And then, emblazoned on a barn, an advertisement for a waterfall where, later, we would stop
And grip the rail and watch the violent, white, transfiguring stalk of water
That seemed to rear as it drove down and shattered on the rocks and clarified beyond
In many little streams that muddled on and vanished in the trees.
Revisions.

Whatever else, there was that world, and then the world that was the world:
River of darkness, river of air. We stood there happy. A year before the marriage failed, the poem of that life already detonating in my hands,
But it would take a long time to put the letter in the mail.