Genesis

Tod Marshall
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Every summer a farmer rolled the hay, created those fat piles we climbed on, leaped between, and even hollowed out to allow ourselves that little cave where we clustered close around a stolen magazine we’d snatched from the corner store, unseen, and near-sprinted the whole way back, a delicious and forbidden pornographic delight. We dared one another to touch our engorged penises to the flesh of those glossy pages and we did it all knowing how your brother, soon to become a Marine, would have bruised our shoulders, how our fathers, if they could have stayed sober for an entire afternoon, would have beaten our bodies senseless, our mothers yelling, then crying in some other room. And of course, they all got the opportunity and more, when your older sister discovered our touching each other without any hope of release, our too-young bodies swollen with desire, so gorgeous in that harvested hay, mist of late summer heat, her hand held by the man who drove the tractor through these fields, the one rumored
to have shot a dog for nothing other than happiness, its tongue lolling as it ran across the just-cut fields. When she pulled back the thrown-away blanket, our cover to that cavern of hay, she was hoping to uncover a place where she and he could twine together amidst that smell, that threatless odor of life and rot, of winter food for graceful horses and lazy cows, that smell so full and fertile, a natural aphrodisiac. We knew what they were there for and threatened to tell as we ran away, out of the field, and back to our houses, with half-unsnapped pants. Yes, we were kids, and yes, she told anyway, our crime eclipsing her little trespass, the reportage probably worth extra hours out on the town, cramped in a rusted pick-up. I didn’t see you for a week and when I did the yellow-brown explained a deeper purple, a belt buckle or fist, screams, your burly father gloating with his hand hard against your throat. And then, just another week later, you moved, taking your older brother, that sister, far away, and I was never given the chance to say these words, constricted by the mute agony of childhood fear: to say that no, my hands failed to malform, curl up with some awful disease, and no, my eyes didn’t rot, drop out like discarded marbles. And finally, no, I did not renounce the act, even after my father made me swear to never think like a faggot again. I guess he got his way. I turned out, in the end, normal as they say, and yet,
even if our caresses came not from love
or any ultimate desire for each other or truth,
but only the vigorous furnace of youth, finger-like flames of curiosity and touch, the beauty
of an act beyond any bruise, beyond any after-church curses from spittle-spraying pastors, beyond
any school-yard teasing from ruthless peers: a beauty
that burns and endures. I will not
remember the curved bodies of the women
who decorated those pages in a blur of flesh.
I will not remember the face of that man
curled in anger and disgust. I will not
remember your sister, that vicious bitch who called me a queer then threw
a bottle from a truck window to scare me away from the curb. We were only eleven
and I may not even remember your name, only
the sweet scent of hay, that luscious first touch
of another upon my body, an entrance
into heaven, then the pulling back of a cloth,
the pouring in of cutting judgment, that flash,
an exalted cleaver heaved up on high by strained
muscles, dropped in a reckless explosion
of clarity, vision, of vicious white light.