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Gold Wake Press, 2008

Dead Zones

MASON-DIXON

We left town and chased the latent summer
as far as West Virginia. I could measure

my breath in drum-beats, butterfly phenomena
of sound. I was the one whose footsteps

down the cow-path the cabbage-whites haunted, and I
am still the one whose anger, breathless, daunted,

rings wild with hunters' gunshots in the hills. My father
brought home nothing. Mom cooked something or other

we'd bought in the valley two days before. We fled
the men, their bandannas, the restlessness of sons

without fathers. "They think we're still at war," Dad said.

LIARS

That's the pain of it, isn't it, remembering

that you were in the wrong. Mercy killing
applies as much when it's a thing not living,

save for the fact that the living are in it.

I said, "Now, I've got to be on my way, going

by the way that all dying things go."

For if I could have spared you
the dying, we would have dared

go on living it.

USHABTI

So far, I've spent today making a grave
for a thing that never lived. It may

be there's some guilt unacknowledged
in this heart of mine for having been

the reason this relic never received
a place that's proper, some niche for shelter

from the unforgiving sun. Sure, I'd be
the one to sit here whittling so its feet

will fit in this box once used to harbor
incense and seed-pearls, goods for which many

sold their trust. These treasures are quietest
inheritance, knick-knacks my parents foraged

unexpected

from the dust.

SNAP

My father haunts my dreams only when he wants things,
which is a welcome change from his normal guise
of latent killer: he's the one who always murders
my mother, my sisters, my brother. He's asking, no,
begging me to write a poem about my grandfather
and the way he's obsessed with taking pictures. Or, rather,
he's describing the way in which *his* good old dad
won't put down that goddamned out-of-date camera obscura
with its lens dense as bulletproof glass and its shutter
swift as the sparrows caught in the chimney, which he
photographed, too, you'd better believe it. And the snow
that fell on my hair, he wouldn't leave it long enough
to melt or even until the next thunder-clap landed
on the grey sky above us with one resounding *snap*.

HOW I REMEMBER

I've been wild since the day you first knew me because
our parents barely raised me. Hailed as a happy accident,
what else could I do but thrive where they put me?

And so our grandparents reared me as they'd done
their sons, and they were not the only ones whose blood
was too busy for its own. For I am just half and just one

in a dozen more children like me. No frills, no lace caps -
so the fireflies wove close 'round my cradle of grass
and crowned me in small fading stars. I've been wild

since the day you first knew me and,

like the fireflies, dying

to dance.