

TO A MAN IN SALT LAKE CITY

1

I don't remember your face.
You might have worn a beard.
You were short, my height;
I was tall for 11.

At K-mart, en route to California
I was in the sports section
looking at the snorkeling masks
when you bumped into me raised up
your knee to rub my inner thigh.

Excuse me, I fumbled
thinking it must've been
some kind of accident but your eyes
locked on mine
so I had to make an abrupt break
to move on.
I smelled your cologne.

I now know your face was around
every corner in that K-mart
pushing itself into
later dreams in which your eyes
stared out cold, needy
from the label on every item
asking me for something I didn't
know I had.

2

The toy section had a whole aisle of trains.
On the speaker, the Beatles sang
I wanna hold your hand,
a line I'd read on a note from Barb
a round-faced girl in my 5th grade class:

I want to hold your hand at recess today.

Check One:

Yes or No .

You strolled up behind me
filled the aisle with your cologne.
I felt a phantom pressure

where your knee had touched my thigh.
My neck flushed hot.
You were singing along
with the song
mumbling the words, pretending to look
at the trains
moving closer
bending toward the tracks.
I anticipated your hand on my back.
Your voice cleared like gravel grinding
into sudden motion
from under the spinning wheels of our camper
a smooth liquid croon, threatening
to pull me under into some
dark breathless world the way I'd imagined the
undertow my mother warned me about. *I wanna
suck your cock*, you sang.

I ran without looking.

3

I didn't tell my dad
even while watching you
from behind his broad back
as you moved through the check-out line
your eyes roving side to side
now empty of everything calm.
You must've known I was too scared to tell;
you were just in line
minding your own business buying a
funnel.

I thought about other boys imagined
scenes with you
I tried to push out with the palms of my hands
against my closed lids
the K-mart, the city, you and your funnel
back in the dust somewhere as I lay curled on
my bed above the cab.

How could I tell the words
you'd whispered to me?
What did they mean about me?
I'd held Barb's hand at recess felt her wet
palm, knew that I was a man, felt it.
What was I supposed to feel about what you'd said?

A real man would've beat the crap out of him
I thought, or at least told so
someone else could.

4

In California we headed
straight for the beach.
Mom sunned on one of the beach-chairs.
Dad had my little brother high on his shoulders
laughing, bouncing up and down with the
rhythm of the tide.
But I found the water so crowded
with the eyes of strangers
I became conscious
of my naked skin
my adolescent shape filling a boy's swimsuit.
We spent days at the beach
but the sun seemed hardly warm enough.