

Why John Calvin Stockburger Fought for the Union When the Rest of Arkansas Seceded

The black boy's belly was round,
his legs and arms were sticks
the white boy would be my great, great grandfather,
John Calvin,
and when the host took the hog
off the spit
he told them both to eat their fill.

Family and friends--- all around, a cluster of eyes,
and laughter easy as the end
of a workday--- only this one, this
black boy,
here for some reason other than the occasion,
maybe to water or feed the horses
but the host had a *softness* and the hog
was large.

The pork was hot and dripping, keeping all these
hungry faces busy,
and there under one tree,
it slicked twenty small fingers, two faces,
both skins,
eyes intent, perhaps the only difference being
beneath... one was too long empty, marked by
a history of hunger.

That night as the fire cooled and the
the long grass welcomed fireflies
like restless spirits,
John Calvin slept full.

It would be morning before a freckled cousin would
recite for him the story of how
the men had shoveled late into the darkness,
grumbling about the
weight of soil
needed to cover even a "little nigger,"
*"Least it warn't that fat mare of
Joe's!"* they'd said.

It would be afternoon as he inched his way
toward the fresh mound

when that same cousin would prod him
again and again,
with the saying the host had coined for the
diggers last night, laughing,
*"Ain't that just like a nigger-boy to
eat hsself to death."*