

I Hung My Head

by Kevin Michaels

I hung my head the day my eighth grade math teacher told me I wouldn't amount to anything, and not long after that I dropped out of school because nobody was going to miss a kid like me who wasn't good at math or anything else they tried to teach. I hung my head a couple of years later when one of the corner boys in my gang pressed that .22 into my hands and told me to take it into the liquor store, point it at the old Italian behind the counter, and make him empty the register. I hung my head when the gun went off — I never meant to squeeze the trigger but it happened, and all I could do was grab a handful of twenties from the drawer and get out of there while the guy bled to death on the linoleum. I hung my head when the cops brought me in for questioning; the detectives were better at math than I was, and when they put two and two together they came up with me. I hung my head when the jury came back with a guilty verdict after less than an hour; I heard my Mama sobbing three rows behind me but I couldn't look at her, so I kept my head down and let the judge's words pour over me in waves, cutting and slicing me like the broken shells you step on when you walk the beach. And I hung my head when I realized my teacher had been right — I was just another kid who didn't amount to anything or mean nothing to nobody.

