

THE SAME STORY

by barry graham

"If it looks like we were scared to death, like a couple of kids just trying to save each other, you should've seen it in color." — Jamey Johnson

Our house was big, red brick, with off-white walls that watched over us while we slept, while we prayed for our souls to be kept, while we shared bath water and bunk beds and the secret of the back closet we will die with and never reveal. Paradise. 1987. Cows and corn stalks and Phillies baseball. Cow shit and dry feed corn and Mike Schmidt, more specifically, if you really feel like bothering us with the goddam specifics. 1987. Iran-Contra and the Cold War and Reaganomics. Everything was overpriced but baseball cards and penny candy and our house because it sat too close to a chicken hatchery, which only means something if you've been to a chicken hatchery. At night, hundreds of baby chicks are disposed of in a big blue dumpster and the lid is closed until they suffocate together and die and wet rot like infected mucous and you smell them decomposing through your bedroom window and their desperate unorganized chirps give you nightmares until you burn down a different hatchery in a different town twelve years later and you try explaining all this to the district court judge but he doesn't care or doesn't understand or the last defendant just told him the same fucking story.

But that first night, after you've been fingerprinted and photographed and you've dressed in to the county oranges and been placed in a holding cell, and you've claimed your spot on the cement floor underneath the payphone beside a drunk hillbilly and a Mexican who doesn't speak English or know why he's there, and you've taken a shit beside both of them, and you've made your phone call to your momma begging for bail, and you've refused the cuisine, soy burger, no bread, mixed veggies, a box of raisins, and sugarless tea, and you finally get called upstairs to settle inside your cell, only then will the chirping stop, only then will you sleep soundly.

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