

Elegy on a country rooftop

by Brad Fisher

Willa knows why Jimmy reached for the thirty ought six
Chambered a round
With three more clinking in his pants pocket
And took to the roof

Climbed the stairs while photos looked on

- them at Kennywood
- them at Hersheypark
- and that one trip to the World
- Tropical heat pounding on them and the kids in
Tomorrowland

And out over the front porch to wait for nine one one to do its thing.

It wasn't agent orange or the agents from the IRS
That put the steel in Jimmy's eyes
Eyes that swept the yard like they would from his deer stand
His daddy's deer stand
His brother Bud's deer stand
Not for Bambi, not here,
But for whatever, nothing really, and finding
A hollow stack of threadbare tires
T-shirts hanging fire, clothespinned at the yard's perimeter
A woodchopper whirligig with no paint

She knows why but it's not a why you can say in so many words.
It is what it is,
and what it is,
is so many words that no one can say it.
Words that became heat and hurt, again and again
Until she knew it wasn't her
(Like in the DeNiro flick they watch)
And stopped trying to understand.

He's up there waiting now for what didn't happen to him in 1971
What happened to the kids beside him in the jungle
What happened that was clean, simple, somehow right
What should have happened to him?
All of us?
But not him.

The yard fills up with light and heat and dust and the squawk of
radios
And boots on the ground.
Willa puts the phone down and says goodbye.

