

The United States of America

by Jason Lee Norman

In the United States of America children everywhere are waiting for summer vacation. To a child in the United States, there is summer vacation and then there is everything else. Summer vacation is freedom. The united states was built on the foundation that one day we will all be on summer vacation permanently. In the sky. All year round.

In summer boys get to become little men, little warriors. They take off their shoes and play in the mud and are constantly dirty. They fight all the time. Wrestling in the grass or along the banks of a river, pretending sticks and twigs are swords and rifles. Summer is about testing oneself. Bear cubs do it, small lions do it, and young boys do it. Constantly punching each other's arms, jumping out of trees, walking along the train tracks, holding their breath underwater, summer is about seeing how strong you are. How strong you can be and what your limits are. Sometimes the boys' fathers test them too. It's a test they can never pass.

Maybe someone will write a book about one of those American boys one day. A writer who can put into words those feelings of muted terror that they felt as they reaches their hands into a mother's purse to steal some cigarettes while she was on the toilet or stuffing a can or two of cold beer from the garage down the fronts of their jeans. A writer who could accurately describe their makeshift clubhouse in the empty lot by the school with the broken planks forming a lean-to against the fence. Maybe the writer will meet one of the boys and he'll write the story when he grows up. Until then he'll just tell his friends stories in the clubhouse as they try to smoke their stolen cigarettes. Stories that make them tick and make them believe in something omnipotent again. In the clubhouse in the

empty lot and next to that a row of houses and next to that, a row of houses. In the clubhouse until it gets dark.

And maybe someone will read that story one day and make a movie about it. It'll be easier to see which one is the storyteller and which one is the outsider and which one is the rebel and which one is the fat one in the movie. You'll be able to see them all looking at one another. Visuals will be important for the part of the story where they all say they're going to sleep over at each other's houses and instead run away, following the train tracks to look for that kid who went missing. The kid who is probably dead by now and rotting in a ditch somewhere. If they find him, dead or alive, they'll be heroes. No one knows why but they'll know that the papers will want to talk to them if they find him. If the director of the movie is smart he won't show the body until the very end of the movie but everyone will know that it's there waiting for them. We'll all watch the movie and hope that they find him before anyone else does.

The best part of the movie will be when they are caught on the train tracks and have to outrun the train and jump right at the last minute. The next best part will be when they finally find the dead boy and he looks like nothing they've ever seen before. Looking at something dead for the first time will make them feel alive. They'll be able to smell the death so much that they'll be able to taste it at the back of their throats and when they taste it they'll know that there is something that is the opposite of life. A thing worse than the tests of their fathers or the beatings of the older boys who can already drive and carry knives in their back pockets the same way that the younger boys carry combs. They'll be able to feel it and they won't be afraid anymore.

And maybe a songwriter will watch that movie and then write a song about it one day. A song with twenty words and like three chords that makes you want to stomp your feet and even has a guitar solo in it. He'll growl those twenty or so words and it'll feel like he squeezed that movie and that book like it were an orange until only the juice came out and it'll feel like a new story all over again. The chorus won't even have any words. It'll just be humming

or moaning or something and when we all moan or hum together,
the song will sound better.

