

Laughing, Crying

by Kevin Hunter

It was Brad, for short; or so he would say. But really his name was Bradford, and he was a writer. He had almost always lived in New York. He was only half-white. His mother had run away with a black man in the sixties. Her father had told her to never come back to his house with that nigger with the big ass buck teeth and the scar across his face.

Because Bradford's father was not a pretty man. He had been burned in a fire when he was ten. They were on a farm, living in a wood home, and his father, a drunk, had fallen asleep with a beer bottle in hand and a cigarette in the other. The bottle fell and smashed to the floor, spreading brown-black liquid to seep into the wood. When the cigarette fell it caught hold of the papers by Bradford's father's side. Bradford's father's name was Samuel, by the way. Bradford never mentioned Samuel's name; he only ever said, "my father," or "dad," when people asked him what made him what he was, now. What made you so determined? Dad. How did you get to where you are now? My Father. Why are you so difficult? My father made me. Why can't you tell me you love me? I've told you all this before. But on this day, the cigarette caught on those papers that Samuel's father used to write on. Because Samuel's father was a writer, and he had gotten to drinking because writers must feel pain to truly write. Samuel grew up to become a writer, too. And so Brad would always say that his father got to drinking and to making his whole life and family a mess so that he could write better. To be fair, Samuel was a moderately well known writer. And in the future, after this story is over, and to the disdain of Bradford, he will become well known like all the good writers do--posthumously. But at this point, Samuel was nothing. And the cigarette caught the papers and the papers caught the whiskey and the whiskey caught something else, and then something else caught something else and by the time it was done, Samuel was in the hospital with his face gone like a toy-soldier set to the fire, disfigured and ugly. His face

was repaired eventually, though, with surgeries that destroyed the family's finances. His mother, who had not been home for the fire, had to work multiple jobs after, and so did the father, whose work only became that much more beautifully painful because of it all. There was an author who Samuel liked, who might say something appropriate at a time like this. It might have gone something like, "so it goes?" Yes, so it goes.

