

Patterns

by Paul de Denus

He tottered up the street, his feet in a bind, the right shoe wrapped with rounds of string he'd rescued from the trash bin behind the grocery store. The foot was swollen and painful and he walked like a man on a tightrope. At the grocery store he bought the usual candy bar and a small crossword puzzle book. He pocketed the change; it was maybe enough for lunch. It took him fifteen minutes to totter back the two blocks to his corner spot on Nansemond and Floyd. His backpack and cardboard sign were still on the short ledge that ran along the sidewalk next to a house with a large perimeter fence. A family lived there and occasionally he could hear children playing in the yard. A dusty memory filtered through his head: *Used to be kids in our house*. The thought dispersed, a passing cloud.

The traffic poured by and he counted time in his head, knew precisely when the corner light would change to red. He stood with his cardboard sign and watched the faceless occupants, watched for a car window to lower; there were few. He sometimes pondered on where they were going - turning left, driving straight - their patterns of rearview lights, bright and fleeting and he wondered if they were real.

The crossword puzzle page wavered in the breeze. One down, the clue: HEATWAVE. He counted out eight blank lettering spaces, squinted upward. The morning sky was a bright blue and he could already feel the heat on the breeze. Rain tomorrow, then hot again, he thought; it was always the way. On the page, he penciled in 'HOTSPELL'. His right foot ached, the sun bearing down as the cars ran by. His stomach growled and he worried about lunch, shelter.

