

Karlanna Lewis

### Ode to My Father's Hairstyles

At eight he is the Yankee Doodle cowboy, hair  
buzzed and buried beneath a grey brim  
coupled with a jaunty toothpick and sprig of wheat.  
Decorated with barber's shears at ten he bestows  
each of his sisters with a bowl of hair, and his  
fop stands tall, a top with whistling,  
groomed down sides, a look he punted to sixteen,  
heightened and grinning in a varsity jacket.  
In a few years hair sprawled over the lid  
jutting from his yellow car, the outgrowth of  
Kal-El, Superman the hermit collecting  
leaping peace frogs. The country football  
martinet cropped his locks clean as his  
newborn and nimble wife, who ran a razor  
over his beard and mustache, defining features for  
Professor Plum. But father was Colonel Mustard,  
querulous as Sophocles, abandoning any plan to  
reminisce on who was what, which explains  
said philosopher's beard, unkempt and ragged like  
tubby and hibernating Mr. Kringle, like  
under-the-bridge and *hungry, god bless*, while his  
voluble voice parted mustache hairs that curled  
wispy over lip. He wasn't a comb-over guy wrapping a few  
explicit hairs over a bald head—he wore a curly,  
youthful pony, juxtaposed with grey, until he shaved,  
zipped his look to Ghandi. The beard twirls alone.

## Elegy for the Romantic Criminals

If he had kissed me on my eyelashes  
they would have regrown; my face would have

kept color and not had to shrink up and hide.  
We hide in mountains, we are the romantic

criminals, caped and caked, and crafting hidden bright  
spots. If everyone's stepmother had a handle on the face

of the moon, they'd have stripped his smoky eczema  
down, flattened his crevices, zipped his dry patches,

until he shone like a plain white punch-hole,  
while we held a tiny card with a tinier hole

to the eye because it's supposed to be like seeing  
your own inner lining, which is unmistakable

and that's why we can't talk. They would have  
flattened him too and because they didn't, that's why

he stayed charming while the world used beetle  
droppings to make up for it's flaws. String mandolins

with the other arrangement of strings were  
something no one else in this huge white universe

had ever heard, except for him and anyone  
like him, and for me, I could have listened

and listened, but for him, his fretless ears closed up,  
prepared for an over-peppered sforzando of toy pianolas.

## For Charles, Who We Chase

Charles with the candle eyes I can see  
ghosts in, Charles with eyes

of blue lightning that flew in and out  
of midnight rain, with eyes of a vanishing

Jesus. He treks between streamers  
of midnight rain and stands to hum

on a cigarette with feet of crumbling  
ash, that never quite breaks, with feet

of elves who cobbled behind the fireplace  
and battled in go-karts at five a.m.

Charles, startle us with breath  
of a matchstick striking, that is an almost

perfect chord on the mandolin.  
Charles with his hair of shredded

gold, with his heartbeat of a vein  
inside the purplest mountain, with his

heartbeat of shifting smoke, that lets  
go and our fingers let go of our

aprons, but Charles with the lips  
of parting glass curtains, with hands

of a blanketing wind, but Charles  
with the voice of palmetto leaves,

whispering in my palms is Charles  
with the voice of the moon's

hands, with a voice that blows  
away & we chase it in mute.

## Card in Papi's Bard-Sleeve

When my foot fell off I tightened  
onto the stick of nothing in my

hand and said adieu. Dad, Papi, my teacher  
told me don't call you father, and everyone

else who used to think was at Park  
Kulturi when the birds became

bombs. Americans have so few words  
for winged things, and to a Russian

eagles and dragons are an exchange made  
on a flat terrace, where I don't have the kopeeks

but the bus *nul-nul-vosem* is stalling  
on my eyes. Oh Papa, oh Papi nothing's

formal now, except attire at the ballet. I've  
seen *Shelkunchik* a thousand times but only

one had a qualified seal to bark for, and Papa, oh  
Papi, *ponyatna ili nye?* I speak a very different

syllable and my jaw needs grease  
on its accent, and I don't have anything true

from you except the story of the time when you  
were six and the neighborhood bullies brought

matches and pocketknives and swindled you  
from youth, and I was there too, a yellow card

in your father's undeniable pocket, and when  
he sent you back out to pull up the beast

inside your bitty six-year-old chest, I wanted  
to throw myself down, because I know you and I

want to show you how not to be a man, but I've  
been a card all my life, Papi, and never a bard

or a bird. And the guitar with Tolstoy  
in the painting came at a price but Papi

you're worth it. I'm not sure if mandolin  
is a better word but that's you Papi, the sitar

in the lap of Tolstoy, who is also you, and that's me,  
the sip of wine ignored in the goblet, but someone

paid pretty money so please drink me and then  
become another song. I'm old from waiting, Father  
Lion, twirl me on a G flat into your Polish gut.

## Post-Performance

(A Sestina)

You've hinged in half. Humans don't fly,  
so how can you? Your dance pulse is weak; sores  
are colossal tonight. And this is your dream:  
to dance, you remind yourself. You say  
"These sequins, sautés, scabs, are all I want,"  
but at night you have secrets.

Projected onstage you rip hearts, hatch love—it's no secret.  
And there is no tinted magic as a fly  
settles on your calluses and you want  
a fresh body. You half-heartedly slap balms, anoint sores.  
But the stagehand is calling, "They say  
please repeat the performance. It was a dream."

Are the red vessels in your eyes a dream?  
You want more moonlit *glissades*. You want the secret  
that is beneath gossamer wrap skirts and tights. You say  
"What do I have to do everyday?" Make the body fly,  
is the answer, and everything will soar.  
You will leap into God's arms like you want

and waltz with him. He knows how. "I want  
this dance," he will command and not ask. In the dream  
he does not have a face, but who knows? The sore  
comes when a boy whines and you don't hear. It's no secret  
you're whirling light-years away. But your eyes fly  
back to your dream—you spin twenty times. Witnesses say

"That was silk ribbon dangling from a kite. Who can say  
there was ever anything better? But doesn't she want  
to use her brain, to stop *relevé* up and down, a fly  
pretending to rise like the sun?" It's your dream  
and you know you are the Russian princess' secret.  
Anastasia is still alive, taking bubble baths to dull the sore.

She has no room for the rubber duck, you none for a shore-bound duck boy. Choreographers direct, "Say everything with your limbs but keep your head secret so the audience will wonder and want and pay, like they were paying for the dream of a world they vandalized." A boy in the bathroom zips his fly

after the show. Backstage on sores, you tiptoe out. You want powdered faces to say lives changed. You go to dream in secret you are a real dancer, one of the birds that can fly.