

Michael Martrich

Through Cornfields and the Backroads Along the Cornfields

Back into the yard again, Lucas slips startled backwards and the motion-detector lights split the spitting dogwoods. Lucas slips backwards arms out then on his ass. He dives rolling dark now in a guffaw behind the spitting dogwoods and bowls bodily into me, both of us laughing, in bodies in the dark behind the spitting dogwoods, me the weaker is my back pinned and, behind the spitting dogwoods, from where beams of motion-detector lights splitting the spitting dogwoods, his weight into my stomach squeezes, “Wait,” I squeeze, feeling his locked arms holding my shoulders down, “The cops.”

There’s a moment of silence taken seriously, my shoulders still held against the ground, beams through the spitting dogwoods, my hands in his loose shirt but not touching him, my hands floating.

Nothing. Just light beams through the spitting dogwoods. Everything stops.

“Our fingerprints. The bottles.”

He’s on all fours looking through the bushes with nothing against my shoulders, nothing against my stomach. He’s on all fours next to me. He’s forgotten about the bottles we left. The light through the spitting dogwoods doesn’t whisper while he looks past the spitting dogwoods into the light towards the house. “What?” He bobs his head between the light through the spitting

dogwoods somehow dangerously into where the light is an abstraction, abstraction and the house. The lights are houselights, turned on by motion-detectors. The lights have been on forever, since Lucas slipped startled backwards and he rolled into the spitting dogwoods. It's too long, much too long for the lights. They'll know there's something here. They'll find us for sure is someone's watching. Looking for movement in the house. The door: maybe someone's there or the window. Or the cops.

“We left them. Our fingerprints on the bottles,” still on my back now I closed my eyes laughing into my hand in the dark. The sky borders the tree. The stars. “On the green, remember?” The hand rubs my face into my hair slowing my laugh is perfectly still and timeless in laughing.

“Jesse's got my bag. Where the hell, he was right here,” says Lucas squints through beams of light won't go out splitting the spitting dogwoods recalls Day Timers with the white goo all over you as landscapers out of high school that summer in green shirts with arms sticky with spit when pruning that collected stems for hugging bundles of dogwood branches against our shirts we loaded wheelbarrows. The noise from the house ducks hitting on my head on Lucas' shoulder from each other and onto our backs laughing. The stillness is gone and Jesse running from the lights through the beams where Lucas slipped and the yard is still bright with lights but Jesse runs into the dark towards the cornfield dark beyond the first row of stalks against the lights from the house if he might have seen us.

The lights still on bright in the yard and the yard is bright. They'll find us. The lights. The bottles on the green. Fingerprints and we're hiding behind the spitting dogwoods.

Just through the yard motion-detector lights Jesse shrieks knowing straight a cop in these parts couldn't catch his own dick in his own hand if he were pissing. Lucas now up on his knees

whispers loudly, “The fuck were you?” to Jesse past us running and laughing straight trips towards the corn trips sideways, airborne with his shoulder forward, past where Lucas slipped splitting the spitting dogwoods and past us hidden in the dark behind the spitting dogwoods and the lights still on in the yard is bright when they’ll find us, Jesse crashing into a row taking out a few stalks. Lucas is already there, shouts, “Asshole!” into the dark gives up our stillness, running towards the corn looking back thinking I hear voices and someone’s coming, the cops see the houselights, lights beams flash flashes shift beyond the houselights and below the hill towards the woods. Running looking backwards feels slow-motion. There’s a stillness in this movement in getting away, in running. Behind me a movie. Behind me slow motion, a belief in a stillness, like how Min looked at James. “It doesn’t hurt. I feel fine.” Her eyes were no longer so big. “Let’s have one more dream together. Just one more.”

In the shallow end of the pool with Min, James straightens his goggles. “Don’t look,” she said while James straightened his goggles and suctioned them around his eyes. Min tossed the pennies into the deep end and her hand under the water let one drop next to her foot. “Alright.” James takes a breath, dives towards the deep end. (She let him go. “Just one more.”)

“Got four!” bursting from the surface is, “You sure you had five?”

Min smiles, thinking of what it means to be missing, gone, or invisible, if invisible is another infinity: the invisible penny by her foot. Invisible’s not quite a liquid. Even mist isn’t quite water. Maybe he’s right. But that’s the hole in the den, sure, that we’re simply left here and deserted or:

the salamanders we found under wet leaves at the edge of the mine hole and once the yellowspotted we knew was so rare (our fathers said so) and told us not to take them home with us if we were to find them, the salamanders, and

insects we don't know the names of underneath the rocks. We're left without a middle man if we're not Catholic. But the arc, and then that none of us matter unless it's right now, this visibility, but then like underneath rocks and thinking only of our relations from these rocks, to these rocks, our rocks, the rocks we know. "What happens when you die?"

"Who fucking cares?"

"Serious?"

"Asshole."

"Be so burnt won't."

In the tip of the flashing arc, the scythe shape, though underneath our rocks that are mine and with us, flashes stationary. The flashing arc in Tory's vision came out of nowhere, out of the invisible, but he can see it now. "Be so burnt won't even know it," the other shook his head. But Tory sees the flashing of an arc in his vision, in his head, is some sort of blunted headache or vision.

"That's my plan."

She let him go. "Just one more."

She let him go. "Just one more." She lets the other penny drop next to her foot. It was there but he'd never find it. But he knew there was a fifth. He knew it existed or had.

Maybe I don't know.

we're the worms and

insects, the salamanders,

"That's my plan," who was eager to follow slowly, James watched rain ripple across water. But some nights before he'd watched them (as if on the outside) in the yellow lamp light softly countering the blue-turning-black night. He stitched the scenes into place. He held the conversation. The moon rose over the deciduous hill and the script played into itself, an everything that seemed to be a part of everything. Everything turned into everything,

like forgetting we're looking at a sunset, like forgetting we're looking. As if this boy and girl had just formed out of nothing and were delicate products, as the night came from this organized scene of impulse,

it changes to then and we see a new now. James felt separated until he felt a part of everything. And then he couldn't say anything, the complete opposite of them who continue talking like the boy who tells everyone he could have been on the billboard said, "That girl's a bitch." They're always talking just to say something. But I think of the arc that flashes in my head, the fingerprint and the name I have given it: Fingerprint. Too, something to the sound on the leaves, too, on the fallen branches we call smooth wood to each other when the poplar bark is peeled off like leather.

"So much shit to do and I ain't even gonna do it," says Lucas.

"Bullshit. You always do your work. And who'm I gonna copy off?"

"Your mom always makes you."

"Still sits with you at the dinner table," remembering when the yellow-spotted salamander yawned, how its mouth opened, the soft pink of its tongue, the salamander's, against the perfect black of amphibian skin, how we didn't want to return it underneath the leaves. But then the past that will become then and then will be then and be cos we've called it so: that's always now, a present (a tribal world). And when it changes it changes to then and we see a new now. And somewhere there invisible, those we've forgotten or never knew existed, those separate. When does that separation occur? It must at some point.

"Well, what do you think it is?"

How does he know? thinking impossible is the telepathy or, Stan brings up the internet in our brains, thinking from trees or the sky, straight-from-the-devil consonants detached from the vowel symbol, not the sound, or this space, in front of us now like when John and I stood, just stood there after he said, "The hell." This is Tory meeting Stan, an English teacher at Tory's school. This is Stan seeing Tory in the woods.

But I say it anyway, almost stuttering, "I think it's a math, like a fractal. Like a fractal,

but it's flashing. You know? Like a math. A form." Stuttering in my head says Tory.

Stan thinks, *a Form*. "Sure, I know. I know: the Fingerprint." *A Form*.

That's how he knows, the smoke and the smoking. He knows the Fingerprint. "It's magic," says Mr. Casper.

A Form,

Tory watches intently, watches him smoke the smell and thinks, *that's how he knows — the smoke and the smoking,*

that in the dream from these sparkling jagged shapes grew scattered blue flowers. James knelt down and as he did he was in the graveyard. It grew dark in the dream and the flowers lost their shine, bowed their heads, and curled within themselves. "James," called Min. "Where are you? Stop messing around." James could see the dim blue light from her phone lighting up just in front of her face. "This isn't funny anymore." Hiding behind a bush and not saying anything, it was a joke. James felt the need to stay apart.

She'd never find him, and James smiled. As he watched her phone stay blue for ten seconds before going out, and then coming back on only to fade after another ten seconds, he felt a cool wind. Once you play a trick on someone you can't take it back. It simply is what it is. It never returns from invisibility.

All this is just a trick
to where the river carved habit where gravity only played a part, tipping at perching. A change in snake. Or the ocean, losing shape inside. Like an old man on his back on the bottom of a boat and hidden beneath the boat's lip, the old man without his line, at what point do stars break into their wavering and into absence? The hole in the den is John's, but I wonder if I can still feel it or know it, know it when John is gone. Like we were kids, me and John, and they think they know us all too well all because they've seen us before at night and because of that, think we're up to no good. But they let us off, every time, after the routine: "Where's down the street?" Suburban patrol cars give us this for us wanting to see the deer in the park at night (that's all) where we

feel something, the something that is taken away with, “Where’s down the street?” but makes us laugh. But we’re here to feel something that’s more than laughter where it’s safe to be together without talking.

We felt something there in the park at night, where we waited for the deer. Our fathers: they knew you barely needed permission, knew the days when every street corner wasn’t a sign, when drinking knew no age only the backhand from a parent, when camping out as young boys was so perfectly normal they knew what it meant to be close to the ground and to be out of reach of the streetlights, out of reach of cops with their flashlights, a sort of escape.

They think they’ve seen us before.

Lucas keeps up thinking like we keep
the trail between the woods and the cornfield like
lying down the dirt and the stars the hole in the den to lie down in
is sleep and the stars and the wind focus on the hole in the den and sleep in and out is in and out
of sleep. “What do we tell them if they stop us?” with flashlights and knew our fathers wouldn’t
care so we didn’t. They knew the days when every street corner wasn’t a sign, when drinking
knew no age only the backhand from a parent, when camping out as young boys was so perfectly
normal they knew what it meant to be close to the ground and to be out of reach of the
streetlights, out of reach of cops with their flashlights,
a sort of escape, you barely needed permission.

Their pointing just out of reach, Lucas dirty and his blood they’ll search us walking this
backroad late at night. They’ll know the bottles on the green, know it was us, trace them to our
fingerprints. My long hair tied back gives it away. It’s the space of trying to think, the deep
inspection. Nobody says anything when, “Let’s just hang here til morning,” is nobody says
anything else walking.

They won’t know me in these parts not by the park is the deer and John and the signs

saying, "Closed at Dusk." Not with the hole in the den but I know it's still there when I look at the stars but seems hollow. Being silent at night and looking to the stars: no John but still silence.

"John's proly laughing right now," brings a smile forgetting the cops and bottles. John's laughing. And in that moment the silence broken brought us together in bodies, an acknowledgment of our same feelings expressed in voice and laughter in the dark of a cornfield and out of reach of streetlights.

The breath that makes lighter like walking to the park to the woods now knowing Lucas thinking of John when I was thinking of John like the night reminds us but not like me knowing the hole in the den remembering when the screen door slammed shut and our walking was not like the walking now but is still getting lighter with a memory not of distance on the trail between the woods and the cornfield and think to cut across the stream wanting mud's another layer, a documentation, a tattoo. The night covers us as dirt and mud, cornstalks and smoking skywards from on our backs blown through the stalks passing off to each other the smoke thinking the hole in the den always a layer or surrounding like the bottles left on the green < the flashlights > thinking I'm safe, now. This is my family out of reach of streetlights.

Lucas keeps up thinking like we keep walking thinking to cut across the stream and the intensity of walking that feels purposeful means to means and breathing is a pattern of circles. When without time focuses on the hole in the den and sleep in our breathing. When without time focuses on our breathing. Lucas keeps up. The metallic diner where in the parking lot Lucas opens the door is the driver's seat is the inside that smells of after school in the mesh seats is cigarettes.

These – Maths – Change – With – Steps in the parking lot to the car or is dodging thicket briar is Longaberger basket briar wire cylinders or now staring at the sky and Lucas in the diner just wants to go home. "Just tired," he said, and we walked into the parking lot looking at the sky on our way to the Tercel.

Fallen trees and branches, wires like garden netting and Susan's hair scratching from her hood, her hair always in a braid and smells like that perfume smells clean like flowers crushed in

vodka (that John drinks, the stolen bottle from his kitchen he might not return [the bottle] but keep it hidden in the woods beneath a rotting log). The lights from houses and streets from the city waver is distance. The straight streets have streetlights and traffic patterns, traffic lights that change and porch lights unzipping the grid with a distance index and a thumb. Then her secrets, the waitress, that the shape of her secrets is her sex, her clothes shaped over her sex, why she wears her blonde hair always in a braid and smells like that perfume smells clean like flowers crushed in vodka (that John drinks, the stolen bottle from his kitchen he might not return [the bottle] but keep it hidden in the woods).

But accustomed to the perfume that smells like flowers crushed in vodka clean and know it's the waitress.

The trail reminds me of a neck, a long neck

like wind in my lungs,

the trail reminds me of a neck, a long neck, when the quickness fades fast, reminds me of the tapslapping of squirrels up the poplars, and everyone wants to leave for something else, something quicker with fewer details and not thinking the souvenir shop employees don't care selling jewelry and postcards and books no one would ever buy except in souvenir shops.

This, like wind in my lungs.

Maybe Susan smokes cigarettes which comfort. Never with anyone other than herself. Maybe her parents let her smoke cigarettes out the window of her bedroom and on the back porch where neighbors won't see as likely and she could smoke cigarettes around me and comfort me in the smoke that is our secrets, our smoke or in my touching the hood of her sweatshirt and telling her her hair is like the ribcages of trees scratching over the path that she is so soft to the tips of my fingers slowly touching, like I wanted to touch John's mother's arm

when I saw her picking up around the house.

The pinpoint goes away but leaves with a blunting for sleeping. A rough, rough leather boot that weighs thick like drowning.

Nothing moves.

Jesse's gone when we get there when "Marco" runs from yelling "Polo" scared as heavy shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhswiftly is through the cornhusk rows through as if a soft hum of machinery, a pounding in his head screams, "Fast!" to the sharp paper-cut rashes from cornhushhhhhks well above our heads against our faces necks arms legs weave and trip-fall the rows of corn stopping the hands into the dirt is I kneel down listening in the now silence to think I might have heard something behind.

Stars in a clear night sky.

It's quiet.

I've lost Lucas somewhere. Somewhere.

Try to hold my breath listen is my heartbeat through my ribs silence but my out of breath but a subtle cough gasping for itching arms from the cornstalks wakes the quiet and wipe the dirt sweated off my face with my shirt. My heartbeat through my ribs like a kid at Community Pool could see my chest, my heartbeat through my ribs remember the pool as a kid bone-thin with bloodshot eyes when the baseball coach told us we'd sit on the bench the whole game if we showed up with chlorine eyes: "Marco!"

Run first! shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh before, "Polo," coughed through the straight rows jumping between falling over stalks on my side tripping at our feet to loose dirt and clumps where stalks and scared laughing bruised charlie horse jaws clenched by this "Marco" trip fall wrists and elbows in Jesse there yelling freakish laughing jumping on me through the stalks into the dirt with, "Uhhff," but then scared where we can't see nothing on the ground in tight rows catching our breath where corn thinks suddenly of the cops to tell Jesse of the fingerprints, the fingerprints on the bottles and pretend prairie-dog-necks vigilance sees white beams flashlights from the golf carts and worry about if the cops have heard. No clue where Lucas is is thinking is he's been caught and start laughing is on my hand on my forehead dirtied with Jesse laughs

suddenly loudly so we hear him and quiet.

Lucas whispers, "Guys? Tory? The hell are you?" from somewhere within the stalks. Makes walking intense purposeful means, walking through cornfields and the backroads along the cornfields, like boys in *Stand by Me* jump into back roadside cornfields every headlight thinking cops still looking til Lucas falling one hundred degrees overextending his wrist left knee and shin bleeding take cornfields along the road holding Lucas on either side under armpits who says, "Fuck it I can walk," and shrugs limping like he's mad.

Jesse says we could navigate pointing skywards our way by the stars but if we sleep here we could find our way in the morning. That's when the stars remind me. I think of the hole in the den and wonder if it's still there, if John's there and the hole in the den.