

Brad Johnson

Allegory of the Cave

James hides the joint behind his back
as the cop approaches and asks
if he's really a cop or only dressed
as one for Halloween. Vonnegut wrote
Be careful what you pretend to be
because you are what you pretend
to be. I am Elvis, the fat one, the one
that got panties thrown in his face
due to what he once looked like. Back home,
my wife refuses to fake orgasm,
insisting honesty's essential
and a single act of fraud becomes
foundational so I'm disappointed
after being pleased rather than proud
about something I never knew I never did.
My daughter sleeps with her noise machine
playing recorded rain for hours until
the timer shuts off. My wife iPad shops
for non-stick pans while Kardashians carry
loaded bags along Lincoln Road
on the bedroom TV. I walk the dog
into the backyard night and he takes off
around the house where the porch lights
don't reach. The shadow on the roof sits
like a slug of black on black. Then
the Great Horned Owl bends its head, its ears
like diving boards drawn down. By the time
I race inside and drag my wife out,
it's gone. When she turns for explanation
I look to the dog for support. His tongue
is out which could be read as confirmation
or something else completely.

Avoiding Extras

Because of fog, the pitcher cannot read
the catcher's signs. Because of rain the rust
along the dugout walls begins to bleed.
Starting time was pushed back to the cusp
of midnight on the east coast. The bullpen's
overworked; call ups already sent back
down. Examining out-of-town box scores
the radio voice applies hit totals
to batting title races and wild card
standings. The scorekeeper quits counting
errors. Chatter from the first coach echoes
across the empty stadium bleachers.
The umpire confirmed Commissioner's
instructions before the game: there's no room
to schedule additional double headers.
A pennant is winnable for another
team in another city who needs the half
game counted. This game must be completed.
It matters more to fans in Kansas City,
northern Ohio, New York than to the crowd
huddling in concession lines, their kids fighting
with plastic straws, their gloves abandoned
on condiment counters and picnic benches.
Puddles push their tides across the warning
track towards the left fielder whose spikes stick
in sucking mud as rain drips off the batter's
helmet who creates a flood when he steps
outside the batter's box and turns his head
to adjust his gloves and study the shortstop
cheating in, the first and third basemen hugging
the line, the outfielders shifting left, the short

fence in right field appearing to lean
mercifully forward, bend down and offer
its neck to the executioner's swing.