

Steve Myers

Haircuts

Backdropped by acres of township shacks and distant ridges,
five guys in the front yard stand around in sweaters,
tan slacks, and snappy fedoras, barely moving, not
looking at each other, a scene blocked for an indie movie
with no one to call “roll picture.” Can’t get a good read
on their ages, and since the virus, does it even matter?
They stare down the highway till they dissolve in a pall
of fog, thick with the cries of unseen ibis. At the cross
roads
behind us, it won’t be long till the morning’s first patron
steps into the gap where a door used to be and disappears.

Imagine the barber, his powder dry and at the ready,
his sheet cinched at the adam’s apple. Part artist, part sur-
geon,
he rests his razor under the jawbone, then draws it upward,
gathers up lather, flicks it into an old tin can. There’s no
running water. It’s in no one’s best interest to break the
skin.

Volunteers

*And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally.*

--“Drummer Hodge”

Nothing was connecting here
and home, what we were
with what we'd been,
“classroom” and “service
learning”—there was a mother,
dying of the virus,
and her filth-encrusted
daughter, and the willowy girl
from Frackville, Pennsylvania,
the way the water
sluiced through her fingers
as she bathed the child
in the yard beside a mound
of red dirt and rubble
from which had sprung the stem
and leaves and tendrils
of a single seedling pumpkin,
which I might have seen
as the seal on a covenant
still unfolding, except
I knew no rain would fall
for weeks to come—but then
the boy with the backpack
looked down at it and said
the name of Hardy's drummer,

one of the works we'd read
"back there" to better
prepare us, as March showers
spattered the windows, as they did
in Dorset while the old man
wrote what might have been
the saddest verse ever to appear
in English, at least for a day
or so, until, walking out
to observe his fellow villagers
again, he returned to his dark
study and wrote another.

In this, the other hemisphere,

reflected in a window of the Paris plane,
this black South African paralympian,
a genuine wheelchair basketball star. Imagine
Hephaestus—his upper body halcyon
summer, his lower, winter—with the tongue
of Phoebus Apollo and the downtown
set shot of World B. Free, which doesn't begin
to tell you how fluid, how soft-spoken,
how beautiful he is, using a version
of his spin move to slip inside the magician's
cabinet of a W.C. like splitting a baseline
double-team, yet no more beautiful than
the Afrikaner rugby player in his green
Springbok team jacket we'd flown into town
with weeks before, a ruck-and-maul man,
his legs twin marmoreal columns, his attention
fixed on "Alien Blasters" and Horton
Hears a Who from take-off to touchdown
ten hours later.

Gaborone

on our left wing, bloody Harare right, Martin
Scorcese's Shine a Light on the movie screen,
Keith Richards spinning sorrow into glittering fortune:
You got the silver, the gold, the diamonds in the mine,
he assures the woman with the flashing eyes, glisten
of his skull ring on one hand, in the other, a fag-end
burning for all it's worth through the old blues tune.