

Mark Belair**On Watch**

A watchful boy stands
before a giant, craggy, fairy-tale-like tree that
bears nine knots where nine branches have broken off.

Knots that bulge like
nine heads outgrown and left behind, faces
twisted by the swelling trunk into demon masks.

At his feet snake
gnarled, bony, grasping roots, the stony
earth no match for their hell-bent encroachment.

The tree's whole, violent presence
the record of a gruesome, unreflective life
the stilled boy, due reflection done, turns from.

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A watchful boy, waist-deep
in a trout stream, casts a fly he
tied himself, at home, from what he had.

Casts it to test
the fly-in-progress in the sparkling water
churning toward him, swirling by him, and past.

Which is how he
comes to know what he
needs to know from where he stands.



Belt and Pipe

A leather tool belt
stows like a bird's nest
inside a new water main pipe
stacked atop others
in the closed-off street, shadowed
tools splayed out, the workers presumably
broken for lunch, jackhammers
and backhoes also at rest.

Given the demolition necessary
to tear up the street and sink
and fit the pipes, this sheltered
tool belt marks a spell
of stillness
soon to be gone, the tools
plucked out, the pipe
chained and lowered, the tucked
wings of this nested calm
worked
into feathery flight.



The Red Cowboy Boot

In my kitchen cabinet, amid
the wine and pilsner glasses,

stands the red plastic cowboy boot cup—
faux-tooled and spiked with a spur—

I prized until, nearing age nine,
it became just a childish trinket.

In my closet, nestled in a box, resides
the red-checkered cowboy shirt with

mother-of-pearl buttons I outgrew
at about the same time.

Things my mother kept from my boyhood
and bequeathed to me before she died, her

saving of them meant to make them
icons of her attachment to me.

To that cub cowboy she held tight,
even as he started to squirm

with a need to break free,
an embrace that grew hot

with stalemate until, at cold cost
to them both, he wrenched away.

His boot cup
now

my icon
of their grief.



Song and Dance

The creaking leather
of a saddle

sings
of the slowness

of the hours,
each step

the horse
takes

a living rhythm
to keep

closer
the closer

the dark
barn.

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An autumn leaf twirls
midair

beneath its tree,
caught,

perhaps,
on a filament

of spiderweb, one
the leaf,

when plummeting,
presumably

rent—
this red-and-yellow

castoff

commanded

by harvest breezes
to conduct

an open air, otherworldly
dance of the dead.

