

from **Sonny**
Mary Burger
Leon Works, 2005

This boy raised rabbits and kept them in cardboard pens in the yard.

He showed the rabbits at the fair. He sold the rabbits for pets, or for fur, or for food.

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Once when it snowed very hard the boy had to climb on the roof of the house and push the snow off with a broom.

His sisters looked out through the glass front door.

—

What this boy liked best about representation was the way it consoled him for being alive.

What this boy liked best about being alive was the way it consoled him for the immateriality of representation.

—

But this was something new—
something out of all proportion—

Once it was dangerous to know that you were not the center. Then the knowledge put us at the center once again. What other creature knew the world that way? We outlasted our own credibility.

We broke our world apart and started over, broke it and rebuilt it in a different form. Now we were teaching nature to remake itself. An abstract version of a civic form. If there was no creation or destruction, what we valued was what we used to build the form.

We looked for one event that would begin or end, a single mark that everything was organized around.

The climax turning unextraordinary when it repeats. So the haze of arousal, undistinguished, punctuated repeatedly

blue, gray, orange.

It was the moment of implosion that we lived for but the aftermath that made it interesting.

—

They mean so many things when they say “brother.” Almost always they mean more than a picture on the wall.

This one was natural, made with an element in nature.

—

Because it isn't possible to explain what we did in terms of knowing, if we didn't know but thought we did, believing that we did,

in order to do anything it's necessary to separate one thing from the others, one thread pulled through the air, to understand is different from the thought,

the rabbit freezes, twitches, cocks its ears, eyes blinking—
to act is different from the understanding of the act—
the rabbit tenses, springs, and disappears,

the act is over and the thought remains—
bouncing across the field and vanishing,

we fell back on the only thing we knew.
Skinning rabbits for fur or for food.

It was the aftermath of industry, when industry had spent itself and moved away, delivered too well on its promises, and had to take them back. The problem was, we gave them more, and they expected more again, they wanted things and time to use their things.

We forced the needle up and then we couldn't keep it there.

Hunting knife drawn down an exposed belly, a beaded line of blood before it's pulled apart, the anatomical candor, not animal, not meat,

it was a natural thing but one we'd never seen before.

—

What this boy did best was what could not be used for anything.
Through every stage of history, we try to find the thing we recognize.

What this boy liked best,
the end of everything, over and over again.

—

In the aftermath we see a clean trajectory, a feat that we can easily repeat. Simple, like a gun. A bullet through a barrel through a head.

Of course we don't have many relics from that first time—a little twisted rebar from the tower. We know we'll never find the hull rusting on the ocean floor.

That's why the picture is significant.

We fought the only way that we were able to—we calculated things the world had never known. We carved pieces of a puzzle we made up as we went on. We knew what we were after—or we knew what we were starting from. It's hard to realize now that we were so unsure—

—

This girl believed her secret boyhood was an arrow, sharp and slender, that would pierce the black smoke around her head and reach clear sky.

This girl believed the small civilizations she invented would be apparent to anyone. This girl held as if in one hand the nexus of a solitary game in the driveway one afternoon, a mother's borrowed dress that hung down to her ankles and her bare feet, and a change in herself with the loose folds around her legs, a sense that she was not walking anymore, she was no longer a person making her way in the world, she was waiting.

She believed the smallest worlds she invented pulsed like blood cells through anyone's veins. Her worlds bumped and clustered and streamed. They were transparent and filled with tiny internal structures—nebulae and networks—each more detailed than the whole. She lay down and felt the worlds settle inside her as if she were a sack of dry beans. When she opened the sack the worlds poured out in a pile in her hands.

When this girl's neighbor caught baby rabbits—flushed shrieking from their warren as he stood startled among his tomatoes, holding the garden hose—the girl took the rabbits and put them in a cardboard box in the yard. She fed them milk with a plastic doll's bottle, which they demolished with their sharp teeth.

The girl posed for pictures of the rabbits with her friend. When some of the rabbits got away, and some of them died, the girl and her friend and her friend's dad took the last rabbit to a farm and set it free.

What is individual about this girl is what is not visible. What is visible is what is not individual—it is what she has acquired through mimicry and recapitulation. It is what the others also know.
