



Opening Up

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Unearthed

Ideally, they are words that dissolve in the rain. The letters leak off the composting paper until the Q's become O's and R's become P's. And they slip out of sight beneath the blades of grass. People tread on the words that dissolved. They feel something beneath their footsteps but they can't place the source or know why their feet continue to fall the way they do. Ideally these are words that have dissolved in the rain. The letters I pulled from a source beneath my feet. Already there. Ideally I unearthed them. Muddy, but perfect.

Peter M.

He is one of those people
 I never know what to call.
He is the father of a half dozen and says
 he's "always been a prayin' man".
He tells elaborate jokes with punchlines
 so simple they seem like non-sequiturs.

All the kids, for which we were responsible,
swam. Sitting beside the pool
he recommended a book that defends
living alone. For the first time
I wrote down the title, but have since
forgotten where.

Mr. Mooney

He boasted he could pull the biggest potato chip
out of the bag on the first try, without looking.
He gave everyone's name an accompanying rhyme
and every declension exercise a wink.
He always caught things before they hit the ground
and never missed the trash can with a ball of paper.

I watched through the door as he took a deep breath
and said to the class, *I have bad news, friends*
—he called everybody friend. But the class smiled.
No, really... trying to make his serious face serious.
The class smiled, and he took a deep breath.
They saw that his twinkling eye was different.
Mr. Weatherwax died last night, friends.

Honey-do

My brother always thought
that they were unhappy
together. I know about
the broken trim
above the screen in
the back. It's on my dad's
list of things to do.
I heard the slam
of the door, the crack
of the wood. Did he
head for the drive
or stay on the deck?
I don't remember
him coming back.
My brother must.

Deep Springs

In the valley, noises
dissipate across their own
echoes, but not before
you hear your own sounds:
your thoughts, your
falling feet.

He grew alfalfa in the fields
and followed his own
footsteps from the night
before to the dairy barn
and across the hills
of the desert that I have
only visited,
but where he stayed.

Once I went without him.
I was able to mistake
the sounds of other's
footsteps for my own.

Misnomer

They used to give
a bumper sticker
to the student of
the month. It read
"The *C* in Cambridge
stands for character."
But there's so much
more than one *I*'s
worth of ignorance and
there's no *L* for lonely or *F*
for forgettable. I joked
that the *C* really stood
for football but
I still can't see the name
as an acronym.
The mascot is proudly
displayed on the sticker.
We're the Indians.

How to Play Soccer

Every time I met with the him,
the gaffer told me to lift.
I never grew into the baggy
sweater I was wearing.
He said *looking at you right
now, I can tell you haven't
been lifting as much as you should.*

My clothes began to feel heavy.
The air between my skin and
the cotton was stuffed with pressure
I was supposed to overcome.
At the same time that I stopped
getting taller, I had started caring
about my appearance. I never should've
planned to grow into my clothes.
It must have been a complex,
thinking that I would. The bigger
I bought them, the bigger I'd be.

I saw the gaffer in the gym.
His sleeves hugged his biceps.
I could hear him say *you haven't
spent enough time under weight.*

Why We Study History

Steve Blass first pitched
for Pittsburgh on May 10th,
1964, he was 23.

He had a 2.12 ERA
that he never matched
in his career.

He won a mid-summer
and a fall classic
before 1973.

They say that's when
he forgot how
to throw the ball.

Now they call it
the Steve Blass
disease. With his
name—just like that.

Talking About the Weather

“Also...” I say
“how ‘bout them Bucs?” he finishes.
And that’s when I decide
that I’d rather be the son
who only talks about our
shared sports teams than not
at all. But I don’t think
of my Grandfather as a
baseball fan. What decisions
did my father have to make?

I know nothing about him.
I know nothing about them;
what they talked about.

Maybe he told my father the
stories that I still hear today.
Movie stars and film sets, cast
dinners and rocky beaches.
After all he did once direct
a movie called *Swashbuckler*.
They could talk about that.
He said that Paul Newman’s fear
of not being recognized
just barely edged out his fear
of being recognized, for the top
spot. I recognize my Grandfather,
And Paul Newman,
But for his birthday,
I gave my father a Pirates hat.

Upstate Remains

Cell phone tower silo.
Washed out headstone
names. A red barn
sprouting a spattering
of antlers. And the farmer
that brings coca cola to
the town hall breakfast.

Driveways filled with
firewood and the kids
who know they'll stack it.
Boats in the front lawn
only used for fishing. And
the last tree on the hill
turning from orange
to brown.

Plywood backboards and
dirt courts. Screen door
security systems and
bikes without locks.
A single-wide in the middle
of the corn field; fenced in
every summer.

A tractor limousine
pulling a wagon filled
with hay bail benches and
pairs of prom dates.

