

Frazier Park

Josephina Wieczorek-Bettendorf

I.

My father set up canvases
We would paint side by side;
Our pictures exhibited
The varied brush lines of a
Nine-year-old girl
And a forty-year-old drunk,
I guess

I don't really paint since he died.

But his paintings were all strokes of light,
Of night,
A skull, or some acrylic body:

(The Moon)

My paintings were all failures
from unreachable ideals;
I could never color inside

The lines
That nine-year-old's mind
Kept tracing

I found my thoughts in graphite,
But my painting once hung on his wall.

It doesn't matter—
I write now;
My father did too
It's one of few things we both did the same,
I guess

I found a poem about me
In a stack on his shelf;
(When he died, and
we dug through the house.)
His love was in Arial
On some dust-covered page
Someday,
Maybe, I'll get it tattooed

To remind me he loved me, on some night
He knew,
With a beer, and a desktop,

(And the Moon)

II.

"We are going camping," Father declared one night
To brother and me, in late fall
As we danced and fought in kitchen light
And turned our heads to his godlike call

I packed nothing but my pjs
And put my head between my knees in the backseat
At the creek, he lit a fire like always

And we sat like the lost boys,
And let the wild light bleed
All over

But it was cold for California and, then again,
A shivering lost girl has no honored name
Among smoky boys and smoking men;
I laid in the truck bed until the sun came

The next morning, brother and I shared the front seat,
Heat blasting
While father stirred in dewy tent;
My eyes were so heavy, consciousness unlasting

Father opened the door and declared,
Savior-bent,
"Let's go home, shivering children.
Whose idea was this, anyway?"

III.

"Do you remember
When we went to my father's house?"
It was emptyemptyempty
Of daughter and brother,
And Father;
It was full of all the (nothing)s that lonely men keep.

Do you remember?
We stood outside on the wooden deck,
The rail drove splinters into my hands,
I tried to remember
When I was small enough to sit on this rail
And, "You can see the whole town
from here."

And I cried.
"I remember," you say, "but I can't remember what you said."

Do you remember
The words that never came?
And if they could, would they?
If they would, what would they say?

*You did not know how those giant shirts
Did not stretch over his tummy
Or how he breathed&breathed&breathed
As he stared each night,
Thinking of all the everything(s) and (nothing)s
That lonely men keep*

You did not know the man in the graveyard.

But do you remember
My tears?
I need someone to know
That I cried.

Josephina Wieczorek-Bettendorf is a junior at the University of North Dakota, where she's studying English with certificates in classical languages and writing, editing, and publishing. She plans to pursue a PhD and become a professor of English. Josephina enjoys writing as a means of capturing personal memories and creating stories that will make a lasting impact on others. When she isn't writing, she enjoys reading, watching movies, and spending time with her husband Jonah and her cat, Sebastian.