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Select Poems

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Nathaniel Hawlish is a graduate student within the English department at the University of Minnesota - Duluth. As a former foster child, adoptee, and as someone that works within the Social Work field, his poetry is informed by his experiences and experiences that he has heard from others that have been affected by the foster system.

No. You're 007

On the evening television drama
my school sweetheart watched
surgeons sew stitches.
Healing hearts.

By the light of a splintered screen
I watch the same show
years later.

As the familiar ache of having held
my phone too long
recedes

I turn over and imagine
their love affairs
juxtaposed over our teenage
trivialities.

As the characters
swap switch squander
their torrid trysts

Each moment
recalls ridiculed responses.
Some fashioned
out of harsh hurts.

I turn over.
I close my eyes.
Avoiding thoughts
of the small-town strangled
sweetheart

and enjoy my
healing heart.

Lessons of the Father

And afterward I walked outside in my father's shoes
which marked the entrance
to our home
like the wooden signs
with burnt out letters.

I walked behind the house
plodding through puddles
placing wood in the furnace to heat our home.

And it was the same
then that the coals burned orange and bright
just under the ash
I raked them forward
and smiled in their beauty.

I brought the wood from under tarp
I brought patience under my right arm
and understanding, my left.
The rough bark of humility scratched my forearm
and splinters of support dotted my wrist
I tucked pride under my chin.

I placed each carefully on this bed I'd made
watching them flare and tease
licking at my gifts
I closed the grate and started
back towards the house.

Smiling Helps

The sudden grimace
of "I think I know your mom."
Faces falling like the last slushman
of a five-month winter
all brown streaks and pointy noses.
"I'm so sorry what happened?"
I wish I could show them
her memory, thrown like the snowbanks
I used to shove my brothers face into.
He and I would stand outside
until our big toes were numb
just numb.

Incident Report: Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)

AC giggled in his room and stifled his pain.

The shock left him in darkness,

He called out

“I stuck my dick in the electric outlet.”

Through the barrier door, EZ asked

“Can a shocked dick kill you”

“My Dad would know.

He’s rad, so rad.”

EZ replied,

“So are you, So are you”

Nephew

Mom was a yeller

like an open window with ears ringing

brother “had to fuck
with your little dick”

later lying on the pool patio bed
her explaining about bastards

years later, a similar bed
the doctors talking
the next plan
and the “bastard”
stood next to me
sparkled marble eyes
filled water wobbling
“when

will Grandma wake up?”