

Fish Heads

We hit.

We kept on hitting.

We did not stop with this hitting for twenty three days and nights.

We hit.

For twenty-three days, for twenty-three nights, we hit.

We could not stop with this hitting until this fish that we were hitting was hit over the top of the head dead.

We couldn't believe it, this fish, it was the longest we had ever before seen a fish out of the water keep on breathing.

This fish, it held on. It kept on breathing. It did not want to stop living in this out of the water world.

But us brothers, we wanted this fish's head.

It would look good, us brothers knew, this fish's head—we could picture it—up at the tip top of our fish-headed telephone pole out back in the back of our backyard.

This fish's head, it was the biggest fish head either one of us brothers had ever before with our boy eyes seen.

Our eyes did not lie.

Our eyes told us what our hands were already knowing.

Our back yard telephone pole, the pole with all of those fish heads hammered and nailed into that wood pole's creosoted blackness, that pole needed this fish head to be up at its peak.

And so we hit.

We hit with our fists.

We hit at this fish with our hands balled into fists, our fists wrenched around hammers.

We took turns hitting.

We took turns hitting this fish.

Like this.

And this.

This fish, it took whatever us brothers had to give it.

It did not, this fish, want to be just a head.

It did not want to be, this fish, because of us brothers, just one of a hundred and fifty fish heads that us brothers had hammered and nailed into our fish headed telephone pole out back in the back of our backyard.

But after twenty-three days and twenty-three nights of us brothers doing this hitting, this fish, it took its last breath.

It died.

It died the way that we know that nothing ever really does.

It kept on living.

We fished out a knife from our front trousered pockets. We chopped off this fish's head.

This fish's fishy eyes, they never stopped staring.

Look how the eyes on this fish keep on staring.

Not even the stars could out shine such shining.

Like stars, we gave each of these fishes' eyes each a name.

Not one was called Jimmy or John.

Jimmy and John was mine and my brother's name.

We called each other Brother.

Brother, I said to Brother. You can go first.

I gave Brother this look.

There was a look that, us brothers, we sometimes liked to look at each other with this look.

It was the kind of a look that hurt the eyes of the brother who was the one of us doing the looking.

Imagine that look.

Open up your eyes up good and wide, I said to Brother.

What are you saying? Brother said.

Hold your head, I said, up close to this pole's fish headed wood.

Brother did just like I told.

Look: we were brothers.

We were each other's voice inside our own heads.

This might sting, I warned, and I reached back with the hammer, I drove that rusted nail right through Brother's eye.

Brother didn't blink, or wince with his body, or make with his boy mouth the sound of a brother crying out.

Good, Brother, I said.

I was hammering in the second nail into Brother's other eye when our father stepped out into the back of our backyard.

Son, our father called this word out.

Us brothers, us, our father's sons, we turned back our boy heads toward the sound of our father.

We waited to hear what it was that our father was going to say to us brothers next.

It was a long few seconds.

The sky above the river down where the steel mill was a shipwrecked ship, it was dark and quiet.

Somewhere, I was sure, the sun was shining.

You boys remember to clean up before you come back in, our father said.

Our father turned back his back.

Us brothers turned back to face back with each other.

Look, I said.

And I raised back the hammer.

Look again.

I lined up that rusted nail.