

*Grand River Avenue, Detroit Riots, 1967*

Sometimes in a young mind there are rabbits sniffing pine cones  
and wet grass in the morning. The world is an aural landscape  
of meditative beauty. In my young mind I'm driving with my father.  
I'm not sure where in the hell we're going. It is July, 1967,  
and there is smoke billowing out of roof tops. Army vehicles,  
which look like big violent bugs, churn forward down the streets.  
I'm told to duck down in the station wagon. I'm told there could be  
sniper fire. My young head could be blown apart like milkweed.  
So I grip the back of the seat with my strong arms like I'm hugging  
the side of a wall for protection. My stomach, which is full of acid  
and stones, tightens. My father looks ahead as if sniffing down  
a long corridor to a doorway, something golden and light.  
I'm guessing he's looking straight into Heaven, for I am Catholic,  
and I can't guess ahead to anything else. Nothing but white light.  
And there are angels, big weeping winged things caressing  
the burning cars exploded down along the side streets. Some angels  
genuflect. Some blow saxophones or trumpets and they throw  
them down on the street loudly. And it sounds like wailing or crying,  
as if all of Heaven's gate had fallen like glass over us. Then I peek up,  
see the black men running away. Some of them run into store  
fronts with no glass remaining. And their faces are terrified ripped pieces  
of rubber. And the police cars race forward after them. Fire trucks  
roar down the road and blow hoses full of water all over them.  
Someone calls them devils but it sure isn't my father, for his heart  
is as wobbly as a bowl of milk and he loves them. And the angels,  
which are large insects with beating wings and wailing faces that resemble  
sun flowers bursting apart, race and swoop down on us. And one of them  
cradles the window of the car like a blanket, a large bursting mouth  
of howling. And he yells at me you will be named John one day  
and you will tell of the apocalypse here. And every story you tell will  
be true. And bewildering. For you fear all this and it breaks your heart.