

Lovesick



Barry Basden

Talk's Cheap

A picture in his aunt's album: he looks about two, barefoot, overalls, no shirt. Standing with a couple of hounds near the well in his Grandma's dirt yard.

"When was this?"

"When your mama left your daddy."

"How long did she stay?"

"Six months."

"Why'd she go back?"

"Because he, by God, outtalked her."

After Hours

The honky-tonk closed and we followed two girls in a Chevy, flirting at stoplights until we scared them home.

A man in a bathrobe stepped into the yard.

"You boys go on now. There's nothing here for you."

I started toward him and his hand lifted. When I saw the gun, I forgot everything else.

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He sat on the edge of the tub and watched her bathe, needing to feel closer. He touched her knee.

"I want to know everything about you."

She lay back. Candlelight flickered, reflecting off her breasts. She looked into his eyes.

"You never will."

And he never did.

A Year on the Rez

After squandering his twenties in bars, he thought he'd found something in *The Other America* and signed on to help the Navajo.

In April, a blind widow torched herself.

At the end of a long summer's day a nursing-home cripple pleaded,

"Take me with you."

Hopes faded like the desert autumn.

That winter, drunk in a rowdy bar, he stole a woman's coat because she wouldn't dance with him.

The Last Time I Saw My Father

He looked small tethered to the oxygen bottle. Hunched forward in his old recliner, he stared out the bedroom window, no Marlboros in sight.

"I can't think of anything but that graveyard. My people are all gone."

I touched his bony shoulder.

"We're here with you, Pop."

His head twitched slightly.

"It's not the same."

Callings

Every five years or so, his stepdaughter calls long distance needing money. "My boyfriend took it. They're shutting off my electricity tomorrow."

"Geez, you need a 12-step program for assholes. What about your sons?"

"In jail."

"Your mother?"

"Broke, still missing you."

He hangs up, takes out his credit card, and calls the light company.

Please recycle to a friend!

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Lovesick

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