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Ode to Arden

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Ode to Arden

By Aaron Bennett

Once, we played in the woods
using those brittle branches as broadswords.
But we always came home with poison ivy
and had to take baths filled with oatmeal.
We made promises to lie on the blanket of cool grass
in my backyard and watch the sky transform
like those action figures we used to love.
The branches broke, the ivy grew, the grass dried
and our toys dismembered.

In the summers we used to throw rocks
at hornets nests and laughed as the swarm
chased us into the laps of our mothers
who made smoothies with too much ice.
You climbed a tall tree once to kill their queen
but fell from that high place and made
a crunching sound.
They stung you 127 times before they grew tired
and flew back home.
The ice melted, the hornets multiplied
and your scars remained.

During the gray afternoons of early December, we walked across
the frozen pond where wild blackberries like to grow.
The ice was brittle and when I fell through,
my legs went numb and you pulled me home
in your red plastic wagon.
We played on the cheap pine roofs of half constructed homes
and in the bronze fields of barley that belonged
to the trigger happy Farmer who smelled of his yield.
I don't like talking about what happened after that.
The pond became a cesspool, the blackberries shriveled,
and the homes were sold at a loss.

At night we sat on my porch
and spoke of cartoons, aliens, and that cute girl in class
I swore would marry me.
We used to dream in color
but soon realized that sepia was the proper hue
and woke up.
Of course, the cartoons cancelled, the aliens never came,
and the girl found someone better.