2002

The Edge

Bob Hicok

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One day the kid showed up with a tattoo of a stapler
on his shoulder. The others had tattoos of geckos
and fish and the Incredible Hulk, an emerald
Lou Ferigno against a background of fire. He'd
have been beaten up except they were dazed by it,
not just the precise cursive of the word *Swingline*
or the luster of the striking plate but the fact
of the stapler itself. He got the last pizza
at lunch and was touched on the wrist by a girl
at the fountain. This made him believe he was real
in a way breathing never had. Over the next
few months he stopped feeling he lived
on the wrong side of the mirror. There
was an election & his name was penciled in
on a few ballots. The guy with the red Camaro
gave him a ride home and let him pick the music.
In second period French he stood to ask
what Harcourt Brace new all men wanted to know,
if Monique and Evette would join him Saturday
on the sailboat. First the teacher cried,
then the students sang the Marseillaise
because in four years all he'd ever said
was como tallez vous? No one questioned the tattoo.
Who'd believe he got up to pee and it was there,
just as the image of the body of Christ
appeared one morning on the thigh
of St. Barthelme of Flours. Otherwise
their stories differ. St. Barthelme was stoned
to death. The kid went to homecoming in a tux
with blue cumulus cuffs and a girl
embarrassed by anything but the slowest dance.