

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jim Daniels: Three Poems

Jim Daniels · Wednesday, August 19th, 2026

Suffocation Of Fences

Skin on my arm pricked with the unease
of exposed wires. Steel mesh surrounding
the yard let breeze through, but still
I wheezed in weeds beside the house
on a narrow strip the mower couldn't reach.

My father at work. The screen door slammed
behind my mother on the porch. The dustmop
rattled and shook in her rage. Dust drifted past
the chimney. I didn't know much, but knew
I needed a place to hide. Four other kids inside.

And a dying grandmother. And a mangy dog.
Three bedrooms divvied into smaller squares.
My father worked at the axle plant. It loomed
over the neighborhood, close, far away.
He snorted if someone called him lucky

to have the job. Not love/hate. Shrug/hate.
I ended up there too. Overtime, fat checks.
Layoffs, unemployment. Suffocation
of numbers. Isolation of dark noise.
I wanted to be Huck Finn chewing a weed

as if it gave wisdom. Firm, unlike the drooping
around me—dandelions, clover. My father took
no pleasure in rage. Sullen sneaking out the door
driving off to another anonymous workday.
He'd stored bricks in a corner of that narrow space.

I stacked and unstacked them like ABC blocks.
He'd slapped my face cutting my hair in the driveway,
clippers attached to a thick orange cord. Mouthing off.

I wanted hair long like those weeds in the narrow strip
growing through the fence, out, away.

Twelve, I crumbled toward manhood, dreamt of rising
like gathered dust from the mop, like cut hair rising
from cement. Bricks against my back warmed with summer.
Soon, I'd have to do my paper route. The back door opened
and the dog's tags jingled, metal against metal.

His hot panting breath delivered
the siren song of the factory.

*

After the Reunion: Most Likely

to crawl out a bathroom casement window.
I'd locked myself in as he banged on the door.
She, sympathetic to a fault, opened it a crack
to her drunk ex, interrupting our own desperate
banging. On 15 Mile Road in Sterling Heights,
Michigan, in February, I dropped softly into
untouched snow. I didn't know if the ink
had dried on their papers. Her mother
watched the kids so she could go.

I didn't ask about the kid she had after
dropping out of school. We'd stripped
in the hallway and tumbled onto a king-
size bed. I'd recently become dis-engaged
during a period blurred by booze and a lack
of coherent dreaming. In my parents' basement,
I drank solitary hours after my factory shift.
The time clock stabbed at me to get it together.

In the parking lot, I crouched and dove
between cars, searching for mine, avoiding
him, wherever he was. A man sadder than me.

*

Making Candles in Warren, December

The smell of paraffin melting in a pot
puts me solemn and in church
though I'm old enough to doubt
though we crowd around the stove
in our tiny kitchen on Rome Street,

yellow globe of light spreading
over us, five kids and their mother.
We pick crayons to melt for color.
We wind wicks around pencils and balance
them on the top of toilet-roll cardboard.
Our mother pours the paraffin in.
Dark outside, and winter. Clear and black
after another winter storm. Our father,
still at work. We have eaten without him.
Frost on the inside of casement windows.
We let the candles harden as we harden.

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