

Cultural Daily

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Justin Hamm: Two Poems

Justin Hamm · Sunday, January 18th, 2026

my father tells fat paul he can no longer visit our trailer

my grandfather's brother he was more myth than man well over five hundred pounds so big and beautiful unmatched taleteller he possessed the warmth of a star the voice of a canyon his laugh was the laugh of a stuttering earthquake and in his tremendous fingers the bass guitar which he played as well as any professional looked like a toy ukulele he had to sit on our living room floor when he visited because we did not own a piece of furniture that would hold him my mother would bring him iced tea sweetened with the pink packets and they would talk about family mostly who got married who stopped calling who still lived up the road who pretended not to know you in the gas station and my father would whistle and shake his head when fat paul told his stories like the one about dusting off a seventy-two ounce steak in texas or the time he stopped a bar fight by slamming two drunks together like clapping erasers and saying now you boys are clean but the truth is our trailer floor sagged beneath his weight we had no money for repairs sometimes no money for lights i remember how dark the trailer could get in the evenings we had to use the kerosene lanterns from grandma and grandpa's and still fat paul sat there on our floor with us back against the wall telling about the time lightning hit the corn silo and turned the sky green my sister giggling at his jokes from the kitchen table me gaping at him like he might be the last real biblical giant on earth i know now my father did not want to say this thing did not want to hurt him or to face the part of family that has nothing to do with wanting and everything to do with what cannot be helped i see him in my mind on the front patio smoking pacing raking his fingers through his dark beard as if he scratched deep enough he could dig up a better answer but he couldn't and he knew he couldn't i think about that now when i am the one who has to decide when it is me holding two impossible options in my hands and pretending i have a real choice and i wonder what it felt like when he finally flicked away his cigarette and walked through the empty lots to run the awful blade of reality through the heart of a man he truly loved

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at midnight buddy holly's eyes fly open

and he climbs up out of the cemetery brushing worm dung from his wool-grey suit stage lights abuzz like gnats in a midwestern cornfield the moon in its priestly collar marrying teenage couples for a night all the peggy sues in their funeral dresses spinning slow while buddy hiccups seventy years of songs written in his coffin the crickets chirping all the dead boys combing their greased up

hair again tapping their two toned toes the dance floor white with the faintest milk of heaven and everything reflected back on itself in the high gloss mirror of buddy holly's perfect capped teeth

(Featured image from Pexels)

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