

EDWARD BROWN

## Written in Chalk

**W**ORKED FOR DURANT MOTORS in Leaside starting at fourteen. When I came on three years ago, the leather apron was so heavy, the pouch loaded with rivets, it pulled me to the floor and held me there. Not no more, though. I've grown since.

Work aside my father and two brothers assembling chassis for the Road King speed truck. Instead of referring to him as *Dad* or *Father*, he makes us call him by his given name, which is George.

On a morning in April, George and me and my two brothers were off to the plant on foot. None of them saw any irony in a family of motorcar assemblymen not owning one yet. Thinking like that, they told me, doesn't go anywhere, so just quit it.

That morning, words written in chalk appeared. Each letter a foot tall. For some reason, someone had written, *Spring is the mischief in me* on the asphalt at the front of our house.

When I pointed it out to George, he shrugged, adjusted his cap and said, "So." I realized long before, George couldn't read and my brothers never cared to. As for me, I couldn't get those words out of my brain. Later, thinking about them, distracted, I nearly drove a grease gun through George's hand.

At home that evening, I showed them words to Mom. She works for Corning Glass Works polishing microscope lenses. It was dark out. I turned on a flashlight. Me and Mom stood in the middle of the street. The words were still there, just worn a little.

"What's it mean?" She squinted, staring hard at the asphalt. Eventually, mom will be blind on account of cryolite, a chalk-like powder that fouls the air at Corning. She said she didn't know what it meant, and then she told me about a king in the Bible named Belshazzar.

She said, "Mysterious writing appeared near his palace, too."

Before going back inside, she took my hand and smiled. “Maybe it’s some sort of sign,” she said. I rolled a cigarette, listening to the night coming on.

Three weeks later, *You have a blue guitar, you do not play things as they are* appeared. George and my brothers walked on ahead, their lunch pails clenched in their hands, banging against their sides like dumbbells. Before I hurried and caught up, I copied down the words.

We assembled motorcars through the summer and *Post o’er land and ocean without rest, they also serve who only stand and wait*, appeared on a Saturday morning in August.

Autumn came. The line slowed. No one wants to see it, but this thing they call a Depression is settling in all around us. Production of the Frontenac sedan has stopped. George was let go.

When I punch out today, it’ll be for the last time. I’m leaving a note on the back of my timecard for Mister Billy Durant, the Detroit boss. Not my words, of course. I’ll let him read what I read in chalk this very morning at the front of my house: *There is something in the autumn that is native to my blood.*

I’m leaving the assembly line and I’m leaving the company house I share with George and my brothers and my soon blind mother. I’m leaving to find the place where people who write poetry on the roads and on the sidewalks live.