

GUN

BILL SNYDER

My father owned a .45—from the war, I think.
Short, stocky barrel, geometric hatchings
down the hard, gray grip. He used it once.
On a dog we had—collie, boxer,
mutt—I can't recall. But it was struck
by a car. The yowls and cries deep in its throat
right after, then silence as it dragged itself
into the yard, hind legs crushed, limp and
loose and bloody behind—I watched
from the back-door steps. I didn't see
the shot. My father carried the dog beyond
the fence, did it among the trees.
I saw him crying afterwards. I'd see
the gun sometimes—always
with him. I didn't know where he kept it, never
thought to look, though I
loved to play guns—machine gun toys
with sounds-like-real, rifles too—bolt action
and multi-clip—and pistols with rolls or squares
of caps, the smoke and smell.
I never tried to find my father's gun. I could have,
I think. And had I found it? Maybe shot
my brother—like the accidents you hear about
on Valley Live. Parents away, or negligent.
Children playing in a kitchen, or outside
by a grill, or an argument in the dim square light
of a damp garage. I'm switching hands
on the grip, sighting down the barrel,
put the barrel down—the gun is a heavy thing.
I raise it horizontal, point it

at my brother's chest. Just for fun, for drama,
for the power I find in tease, my budding male
vernacular. My brother slouches
young and vulnerable and defenseless
and I hold that gun close to his small,
thin, body—the smell of oil, copper,
steel. The smell of power. Smell of father.