

# 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.