

from Juked #7, Spring 2010

DONNA ISAAC

WEST VIRGINIA: STEPS

1.

In this land of both white
lightning and snake handlers,
I watch a rabbit eat
the leaf lettuce in Aunt Jan's garden.

2.

Tootsie in the trailer next door wears
pink foam rollers in her hair
and watches reruns of *The \$10,000 Dollar Pyramid*.

3.

There's no revival here
except down the street the hawking of hillbilly
heroin and the writhing woman
beneath the hammering man on sheets gone gray.

4.

Coal miners get by
while mountaintops fall into creek beds.
The Pancakes are packing up
their pots and pans and getting out of town.

5.

Sissy finally had that tooth pulled
root and all, then planted it in the sandy soil
at midnight to put a heart hex on Monroe down the street.

6.

The dentist checked for Mountain Dew mouth

and then drove off over the broken pavement,
running over a rattler whose sequin skin quivered in the sun.

7.

Monroe was fine, and Sissy discovered strawberries
rooted, popping out of the selfsame spot in June,
the moon when the strawberry is red.

8.

Eight painted ladies like bellows opened and shut
in the smoke tree. Nearby, the crepe myrtle shaded
Eddie's grave, near Roger Mason's, his kid brother.

9.

After Jan went to bed, after the Pall Mall cigarette,
thunder rumbled over the foothills, and rain spattered the football
field. Rain pelted dogwood petals but stopped by midnight
when Ken, his prison guard uniform wet, came home.

10.

I'm leaving today, riding past Cacapon and on into Winchester,
passing over the Shenandoah, which runs high from the storm.
I can't come back again for awhile but think always of your bad
heart,
your green beans and ham, your blue eyes.

11.

On into Virginia now, turkey buzzards overhead,
my sister and I stop for a sweet tea at McDonald's,
thinking about long lost rituals, people in small houses.

12.

Early July, black clouds follow us to another aunt,
this one in a nursing home on old Plank Road. TVs
blare a black woman's cry, "You are the father of my baby!"
The air conditioning never really cools us down.