

THE CUPELO

Charles Casey Martin

Papa Ed and Grandma Gracie lived eighty years;
their daughter was Lily
who married Frank. The children of Frank and Lil'
were Steve and Belinda,
their dog was Boxtops, their house a brick
next door to a wilderness.
Papa Ed and Grandma Gracie lived eighty years,
and every fall Lily cut herself
putting up preserves; blood was never redder to her apron
than the stain of berries.
Lily bleached the handkerchiefs, gray with sweat,
that Frank used Sundays
to cover the mouths and noses of children he baptized.

Papa Ed and Grandma Gracie lived eighty years,
and with the lowest bass
vowels of his prayers, my uncle Frank—metallurgist,
minister for the Church of
Christ—could actually ring the empty cups and bowls
that waited Sundays
on the table for dinner. He could compare:
the alloy of the Trinity
to formulas for the miraculous conversions of metals,
or a churchwife's peroxide-
blonde hairdo to her Frigidaire's meatkeeper, frosted shut.
In the stomach of
Lufkin foundry, he said, burned the anger that liquified
scrap and, once, the steel
bootshanks of a workman who stepped too close:
this was the cupelo
and Frank was its keeper and tamer; Steve and Belinda
shared a cup of chocolate
he brewed for them on the hissing lid of Hell.

Papa Ed and Grandma Gracie lived eighty years, then they died,
and Lily sewed a new housecoat.
Or Frank called it new. The big and little
rectangles of brown,
green and blue were really towels and washcloths
whose nubs the hides of
various Martins had, after many baths, finally erased.