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# Jim Barnett's Pigs

Boyd White

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## Four Poems · *Boyd White*

### PAPER PLANES

*for Carolyn and Paul*

All afternoon you turned your heart over in your hands and rested in the shade of the largest tree. I sailed paper planes from the roof of the house, calculating distance, and remembered a friend who in a letter from another country mentioned how he feared the worst: "I worry sometimes that I'm going to get cancer or have some other tragedy to make up for what I'm feeling here daily. . . . We were sitting in a boat not listening to our coach when a huge white swan strafed us only inches from our heads. You could see its crazy, orange feet dangling. . . ." Small wonder when I rose to step back through the window, my shirt-tail snagged on a broken shingle, and for a second I hovered above the house, gathering the sky into my arms. It was then I thought to turn and look for you, to try and gaze beyond the edge of the roof, but the evening light around me was beginning to fail, and already you had abandoned the safety of the tree.

### JIM BARNETT'S PIGS

It's the same old story—love gone bad  
and imperfect timing. The sheriff's surrounded  
his farm, so he raises the halo of a lit match to his forehead  
and ambles deeper into the mines. He's heard of a boy  
who got lost and learned to live off bats and after a while  
developed a kind of radar. By the barn  
two deputies cover their mouths with handkerchiefs  
as another muddy bone that's been picked clean is pried  
from the pig sty's muck and pitched beside the others,  
the floral print of her dress, her high school ring.  
The police haven't even started to dig in the basement,  
and the sheriff's already sweating in his shoes. He's ordered

the dogs to sweep the fields up to the orchards  
though the authorities can guess he's beaten them to the shafts  
that haven't been used since the Civil War.  
He knows full well they won't risk following him—the supports  
are rotted through, and those pockets of gas tend  
to shift suddenly—he'll forget what  
he's been taught about light.  
He doesn't need to see the reporters  
forcing their way through the road block  
to know that they're screaming for action from the sheriff  
who's just taken off his hat and wiped the sweat  
from his forehead and turned away from his deputies  
who are shooting the pigs.

### BLOODWORMS

My father hides in my blood and breathes air through a reed.  
I have lost his scent. I cannot find him.

Is he in the crack in my spine? In the light behind my pupil?  
I ride on horseback until the sun hurts my eyes;  
it burns the backs of my hands.  
I drink limewater from a metal canteen.  
I pick the lining of his boots  
and plug my ears against the wind.  
I search for pieces of his clothes  
among briars and weeds.

Like a pin, he has made himself small. He is in disguise;  
he has wrapped himself  
in the skin of a doe. He chews  
the roots of my hair. He licks dew from leaves.