

2001

Norval

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Recommended Citation

Crowley, Michael Yates. "Norval." *The Iowa Review* 31.3 (2001): 169-171. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5477>

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Michael Yates Crowley

NORVAL

It's only been two days
but already I can't remember if I got stung
or lied about the bee trapped
in my sleeve trapped in me
while I yelled and tried to make my arm
not mine up on top of the hill
where they keep the bees in a white fence
that wouldn't stop them, wouldn't stop Lawrence
when he hid there later, when we played,
risking the hornets until it was dark
and he could jump out at Vincent
and he could die laughing
and Vincent
could just die.

The game covered each boy's fingers
that we could see, thicker
on the ones who won making
their food taste and until you could run
your tongue up and down the paths
and the anxious forests and into the seams
of the maples and never not taste it.
It was like that even when
I had a wasp in my yellow coat,
in the sleeve trapped in the arm it must look
like a tunnel with the sun just breaking, cracking
and I screamed at it
to cause pain and fall.

Besides that one time when he went over the white
fence Lawrence never hid during the game,
but you could still

never get him because if you tried there'd be eight kids
rush out and get between you and him
to stop you, even though he never hid
so he never found the black fence
that kept us in, never found those places
where you could feel how young you were,
where you could smell the youth on us,
where I saw a real horse rolling back and forth
like maybe it had a bee too
and it kept rolling and moaning until they made it stop
and never once touched it after that.

Then I didn't want to play, when I found
that place where deer must have meant to go
when it got dangerous, because I got there and it kept
saying 'safe, safe' like a goddamn baseball announcer
or one of those kids they kept inside at night
because they were different,
even though they would have come out, even
though they tasted like us
too, even inside;
inside here where instead of playing
I looked up, watching things
I couldn't look at until I started falling into it, falling
upwards toward them without
the strength to stop.

playplayplay little boy
I can see their nervous feet and
they whisper my name:
when I rise it's not too late
but when I move forward
it is and I can see the whole
picture, of Lawrence and Vincent
and eight smaller things and they're just there waiting,
as if they wanted me to finish crying
into the bowl of the sky so it would fall

back down as rain
and they would stop the game except
they never do that and you couldn't want
it, even if you don't taste
like us, even if I spilled
most of it, even if I touched
Lawrence slowly so he turned
around and he could see me and I could see him
and you could think we were such good friends
and I could die of happiness and
I could die like the horse
which must have been hurt pretty bad
and I could die of that I
could I think if it were just a bit closer to me,
and Lawrence,
he could just die.