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Detroit, 1972

Jim Daniels

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JIM DANIELS

Detroit, 1972

3:00 a.m.

At Top Hat Hamburgers
on the Detroit side of Eight Mile Road,
dirty snow smudging the curb
under glum streetlights, I gripped
the stainless steel counter to stop
the stool swivel. Drinking age, 18.
Or 16, using the new math. I was exempt
from the draft and immune to football.
5 years since the riots—under the new math,
yesterday. Outside, the world swirled past
in the stretched poisonous lights of every car
speeding through the sleeping world.
My first car slanted across the blurred
yellow lines in the lot. A black kid
maybe my age scraped the grill
behind the counter. Time scraped
the world off the dirty road, the clock
emptying out toward 4, leaving
only the desperate, the lost, the over-
cooked. How did I end up there alone,
a blue sludge of blood above one eye,
flunking every quiz on my future?
The kid, maybe my age, looked up at me.
Oh, we hated each other instantly.