

Yalobusha Review

Volume 5

Article 20

8-1-1999

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Recommended Citation

Natal, Jim (1999) "Birthright," *Yalobusha Review*. Vol. 5 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr/vol5/iss1/20>

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Jim Natal
Birthright

You'd think I was Esau, the amount
of hair I lose. But not his dark, coarse animal kink.
No, these birthrights of mine are silvery thin
as a crescent moon scything
a clear night sky like my father's hair in his age.

Or maybe a few I find *are* my father's,
protein keepsakes in a drawer, like Civil war
locks under pocket watch glass,
hairs pressed within like leafless stalks.

Or hair-wrapped amulets, tightly bound bundles
offered on the backs of fetish animals
to keep safe, speed the dead, feed them.

Or the merely dying, yanking tufts painlessly
from they heads, exposing
the creases of scalps for the first time
since birth. Light, air, sound,
hair falling more insidious than snow
that sprinkles your shoulders and chills them
through by the end of the night,

Becoming heavy, perched there
like Odin's ravens, Hugin and Munin,
thought and memory, who fly
out and return with news of the realm:
that it's crumbling, toppled pillars like fallen
hairs swept into a pile on the white tiled floor.

Or allowed to drift,
plowed snow along the rounded highway
shoulders, mounded and obscuring the view,
making mountains seem more distant.

Or these hairs of mine, of yours, hollow shafts
under a microscope with bark like cedars,
trees blown down and arrayed after an eruption
that laid end-to-end would reach to

Metamorphosis, the silver hairs fitted back to life,
to a handsome head with a mouth that says,
"Poetry is just a stage everyone goes through.
You'll get over it soon." Words that cannot
be traded for a bowl of anything, worn
on the outside like my graying, thinning hair,

Or carried within, unloseable and silent as a gene.