

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Michael Pfeifer

It is a city of bricks.
Trees and rudimentary birds
exist like the indefinite horizon
or a doorway invalid at dusk.
The sycamores turn into a soft, yellow dust
identical to mortality.
It settles on everything:
on the bare yards
with a single white mulberry tree,
in the coils of springs,
in the mattress and quilt
of an old affection.
But mostly the dust sticks to the women
and to those becoming women,
just as the rain sticks to everything here—
without ever really falling.
East of here is the river:
a curving, grey seam
or a fresh weld.
And at night it has the character of night,
of a tall woman
who thinks clean water must spring from all her wounds
because of the white carnation
she left on the kitchen table.
Maybe in the morning
a shirt floats near the levee.
Sometimes there is even a pair of black shoes
with the socks neatly rolled inside.
Always the same pair of shoes.
In the city's last hallucination
there was a telegram in the blue pocket of a thunderstorm.
In 1927 a tornado stumbled from block to block
and found a tree full of starlings.
All the air managed to rush inside
looking for bones to turn into children.