

## THE CUPELO

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*Charles Casey Martin*

Papa Ed and Grandma Gracie lived eighty years;  
their daughter was Lily  
who married Frank. The children of Frank and Lil'  
were Steve and Belinda,  
their dog was Boxtops, their house a brick  
next door to a wilderness.  
Papa Ed and Grandma Gracie lived eighty years,  
and every fall Lily cut herself  
putting up preserves; blood was never redder to her apron  
than the stain of berries.  
Lily bleached the handkerchiefs, gray with sweat,  
that Frank used Sundays  
to cover the mouths and noses of children he baptized.

Papa Ed and Grandma Gracie lived eighty years,  
and with the lowest bass  
vowels of his prayers, my uncle Frank—metallurgist,  
minister for the Church of  
Christ—could actually ring the empty cups and bowls  
that waited Sundays  
on the table for dinner. He could compare:  
the alloy of the Trinity  
to formulas for the miraculous conversions of metals,  
or a churchwife's peroxide-  
blonde hairdo to her Frigidaire's meatkeeper, frosted shut.  
In the stomach of  
Lufkin foundry, he said, burned the anger that liquified  
scrap and, once, the steel  
bootshanks of a workman who stepped too close:  
this was the cupelo  
and Frank was its keeper and tamer; Steve and Belinda  
shared a cup of chocolate  
he brewed for them on the hissing lid of Hell.

Papa Ed and Grandma Gracie lived eighty years, then they died,  
and Lily sewed a new housecoat.  
Or Frank called it new. The big and little  
rectangles of brown,  
green and blue were really towels and washcloths  
whose nubs the hides of  
various Martins had, after many baths, finally erased.