

LOWELL JAEGER

Here's Something You'd Better Know:

he says, *you gotta pinch a fly
to make him dead. You swat 'em
and think you got 'em.
But you don't.*

He holds the hapless beast
by the wings, shoves it
six inches from my nose
to show the legs still kicking.
And squishes it like a garden pea
between his fat thumb and forefinger.
Tosses the corpse in a coffee can
half full of its crushed brethren.

It's a backwoods bar
somewhere almost Canada. Sort of
a grocery store too. And gas station.
All jumbled. Motor oil stacked
beside a cardboard rack of packaged
undies and socks beside potato chips
next to fishing lures and laundry soaps.
All of it dusted the same
as the pumps outside and the bushes
and pines along the gravel roadway.

I'd parked my butt on a bar stool,
slammed a couple of shots for nerve.
*Thawed some good baloney yesterday,
how 'bout a sandwich,* he says
and wipes his meaty hands on the bib
of a greasy apron across his chest.
Throws a half loaf of bread in a wide open
trash bag behind the bar next to his can
of trophy kills. *Damn mice,* he says.

Then he lights up an old TV
hung high in a dark corner at my back,
and I know for sure what I've come
to do. It's a newscast, and smack
in the middle of whittling mold off a block
of cheese, he goes green and looks up
at me, cheddar in one hand, kitchen knife
in the other. *Say*, he stammers,
you're the guy... the guy that...

What do you call that look
like he knows he's swat? Falls
face first on the baloney he'd sliced
and laid out for my lunch. Bullet hole
draining like ketchup. *Here's something
you better know.* I pinch both hairy
forearms. Less than a hundred bucks
in the till. Grab a bag of chips. Two six-
packs. Kick the door so the hinges
won't close. Let the flies have their way.