

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.