

Two Poems · *Aedan Alexander Hanley*

LOUANNE AND THE PACK OF KENTS

I was thirteen when I had my first
butt. Robin, this milker, turned me on
to Kents. I'd lime her
barn for money and cigarettes,
then walk five miles
for a pack. Barefoot down
the cracked-up road, pressing tar
bubbles with my heels,
I'd pass this old Coldspot
freezer smoking fish out its sides,
and this horse, Patches, who hung
with the cows because he thought
he was a cow. Taking the bend
on HWY. J, then five steps up
to Braumshreiber's general store,
with its wooden floor and fake front
like a Hollywood movie,
I stood in the doorway, looking down.
The long aisle, to its meringue
ceiling and lobby lights, lit
a butcher's face, his waxy mustache
dulled by yellow haze, and white
apron bloody with guts
from Patsie Sheffen's old bull.
My front tooth missing, shorts
to my knees, and hair combed
flat against my face, I'd ask
for a pack of Kents. Louanne ran
the register. "Are you old enough?"
she'd say. Louanne was big. Breasts
to her waist, blond hair
shorter than a fly's, and a sunburn

around her raveled elastic swimsuit.
She'd throw me a pack
and buy me a cone just so
it would look good. I'd sit where
the old-timers in clean
pressed bibs watched trains, eat
my cone, smoke a butt, and listen
for the old Chessie
to squeal through town, drowning out
the smell of cows.

A WOMAN BY THE MISSISSIPPI

Her expression is nothing
to look at. You would think
her occasional pats of the water,
the rippled buildings
reflecting, boats and people
thinning out with each wave
was a romantic thing,
but it isn't.

The Mississippi is like a fat slug.
Its surface images of thin,
rheumatic couples holding hands
edge the river, and break
the sand—slurry crabs hide
their faces, distorted,
tinged in the dirty light.

The river isn't beautiful today.
Its brown mouth spits up
stones along the shore, the pitted ones
layered on layers
of smooth snail and crab shells.
And only the weepy tree at the river's back
waves over the water soft and green.