

PRETTY BOY FLOYD

to mark the 50th anniversary
of the death of pretty boy floyd
here on a farm in east liverpool
the town bigwigs put on
a polite little skit,
had a writer who penned
his biography speak
& put up a plaque
commemorating
the gunning down of floyd.
attorneys, councilmen,
society ladies & bankers.
the very kind of folks
that pretty boy supposedly
struck fear into the hearts of
half a century ago,
the very people that still
rob you with a fountain pen
as woody guthrie said.

PRIORITIES

reading a watchtower
that someone left behind
& drinking old grandad
straight up
thinking who cares
about liver damage
& the apocalypse
when you're losing
your hair

— Mark Hartenbach

East Liverpool OH

WITNESSES

We shut off all the lights,
the T.V., lock ourselves in
like nervous Warsaw Jews.
They're parked in the driveway
in a new silver Camry.
Two women, thirtyish,
clean-cut, in the back seat.
An older man in a dark suit
behind the wheel.
I hear the car door slam,
the chatter of the women's
heels as they approach
the front door. They rap
five times on the storm door.
My wife's raised finger
shushes the children.
We all hold our breath
and wait for the second
round of knocks.
Nothing.
Then a rustling of papers
as they shove a Watchtower

under the door.
I whisper to my wife
I thought they'd never
find us out here.
She says,
They're everywhere.

AWAY FROM THE HOUSE

He'd been gone over
a week. People said
at his age you
have to expect that.
Still you're not ready
for him when he returns
hair greasy and matted
eyes a little hazy
one ear torn
near the skull.

The next morning the first
signs, a bubble of froth
in the corner of his mouth
dried drivel in his beard
constant pawing at the door.

The vet says it's hours, maybe
minutes before the first snap.
Do I want him to do it?
I laugh. No, of course not.
I've slit the necks
of wounded deer,
slipped the barrel
into the snug hollow
behind a hog's ear.

I open the door, want him
to run far away from
the house, up through
the goldenrod and burdock where I
will have to exhaust
myself to get a clean
shot at him, but he
won't leave,
stretches out on
the picnic table, flexes
his claws and waits
for me to load.