

## *Two Poems*

AUSTIN SEGREST

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### *Shades Mountain*

Born on top in Brookwood Hospital,  
I was raised on the backside of the mountain,  
really just a ridge, suburban subslope  
under Brookwood Road's  
irresistible straightaway, its thick trunks  
waiting for the cars of high school boys  
to wrap around them. A notch below  
Old Leeds Road, it's called Flat Ridge  
on some older maps—which, if topographical,  
will show we lived beside a gorge  
in the limestone called Fuller's Creek,  
though, so far as we knew, it  
and the others it joined didn't have names.  
Their terminus did: the Cahaba,  
dreaming its wild country length  
at the edge of my mind.

Running along terraced streets,  
driveways cut diagonally up to either side  
of the uphill houses. Down-slope  
driveways were steep as slides,  
houses sunk below street level.  
At the merger of backwoods  
where we spent most of our time  
you could get a sense of what  
it would have looked like before,  
if we'd only thought to look.

After the iron ore mines  
and mansions of Red Mountain,  
Shades was the next ridge south,  
at a second remove from downtown.  
Its north slope and valley were the crown  
jewel of Robert Jemison's  
1920s whites-only estates.  
Once interlaced with riding trails,  
labyrinthine roads wound the contours  
of forest, crag, and creek  
embedded with two country clubs  
made to look like they grew that way.

Those kids were many of them  
second or third generation  
inner circle, inaccessible.  
Though we're good and gone,  
though like the juniper bushes  
on the raw shale embankment  
my parents built on, we didn't take,  
to this day, an old pool's local stone,  
or mottled sunlight on original tile  
sends me into a trance. I think  
if I can get it mapped I'll have it.  
But then an arm gets free, a winding climb  
I'm confusing with another, and the old  
conundrum slips my grasp again.

*Forest Run*

Across the dip, in the driveway of the neighbors  
 who bordered on the bird sanctuary  
 and had built their house themselves,  
 I'd watched as a small boy as Dad and the father  
 and his teenage sons changed the brakes  
 on Dad's toast-colored Accord.  
 When he would say he'd consider going  
 on a mission to Mars, we imagined him  
 in that hatchback, listening to classical.

Their back deck, I was envious, looked over  
 the table-rock. Below us,  
 you could hear but couldn't see  
 the tunnel pouring out in its pool.  
 One of the brothers, Robert, was the sitter  
 who'd take us hiking, and once,  
 singing along to "Everybody Wants  
 to Rule the World," had driven us  
 down to the Cahaba to wade  
 and float the shallows with mussel shells  
 between our toes, a riddled cliff's  
 empty sockets peering down.  
 His brother Jonathan was in the Airforce  
 and had a motorcycle with a tall clear shield.

Someone was pointing out the parts:  
 caliper, rotor, break-pad, words  
 I'd never heard, or said,  
 the incredibly heavy tire laid over  
 on its side. Everybody squinting.  
 The secret life of a wheel! The rotor,  
 I was warned, was dangerously hot,  
 not just from the sun, but from the friction.

Unable to believe it, or to resist  
getting close enough to see,  
my hand leapt at the sizzle.  
The smug humorous response was aired  
that I'd think twice next time, Dad going along,  
never quite fitting in, maybe a little  
embarrassed himself. They tried to walk it back  
when I started crying,  
but I wasn't buying it,  
and, anyway, it was too late.  
My fingertip whitened  
like the mythical Shepherd  
trotting down his fence.  
I wondered if it would change anything—  
my fingerprint, for instance,  
my permanent record.  
If I even had one anymore.