

jules

by Rucker Manley

i have not seen jules in fifteen years
but he is still in me like chop—
lamb marinating in milk. i carry him and
will, until the ledges call me home

there was poison in knowing jules:
the doctors had blessed him the same, adhd
—boy, oleander, sweet sassafras,
godslope lily of the vale—the glen calls us both

in him, i was Not Good and i am still Not.
he was my mirror: every penance he paid,
i expected to cough up too until
finally the world got sick enough of us

i am thirty-two now and still waiting for the world
to tire of me the way it tired of him, to forget me
the way it forgot him, to cast me aside like
it cast him down, i am waiting, i am waiting

his sister was his better and she and i were
closer, for perceiving him was suffocation.
the way he garbled and stank, the way he cloyed
to be noticed, a lamp crashing to the floor!

julia was what jules was not, the way my foreground
is not my background. we hid from him,
but my and her friends were his, and we navigated
all of him, all of him together

julia was a way to keep jules close
without being close to him

a goliath of a boy,
echo, polyphemus, dogberry—
we both worried abel in our hearts
but only he clawed him down

jules will always be fourteen, that last moment
i saw him before they cast him from school to safe place
staggering out of second period with his
limp and bloody appendage
fresh mauled from where he had flagged

his whole name, embossed into his arm:

J E W E L S

he wanted us to notice him,
wagging thirty-three staples, the same
lacerated way we all want to be seen

jules glinting armor, barking!
our eyes turned downward
waiting until it was safe to laugh

i am still waiting until it is safe to laugh:
at myself, at jules, at cunning terror
that he was braver than me to face