

in that part of tennessee you had to have permission  
of someone who knew you  
to travel further into  
the hills.

i was a low skill construction boss  
needing low skill workers.  
homeless tony george  
who held long discussions  
with people not there  
perhaps who were never there  
but never seemed to leave  
wandering the  
the backroads  
always wore a long overcoat  
and was welcome overnight at any house  
because his drugs  
were good and he shared his government checks  
with anyone who was needy  
said he was available  
and had several friends  
that needed  
hard cash  
for their families  
which was how i met and hired andy  
with his long knots of blonde hair  
and sharp face  
that burned with far away eyes.  
we agreed to the terms of employment  
which included not picking  
and ingesting purple mushrooms  
on site when they were in season.

andy was what he was  
when he came back  
from vietnam as a  
long range reconnaissance  
special operations  
enthusiast.  
his grandmother tended the pot garden  
while he was gone.  
his six dogs would not let you get out of your car  
unless they were assured you were a known friendly.  
andy had a smile you could not anticipate  
and a laugh that expanded his thin cheeks.  
his wife had her house and rules  
about where dishes went  
and how far she could go  
interfering with the men.  
we were finally allowed into  
the family passed down inherited house  
and sat down in a drug circle  
where he opened his box and rolled joints.  
he passed one around and  
let his five year old son  
smoke with us  
whose child eyes  
were a distant coastal blue  
and was adjusted  
with prescriptions  
by the doctor who managed  
the treatments designed  
to maintain his behavior.  
the dogs settled down with vigilance.  
andy said he had come back from vietnam

with jewelry  
and opened another box and put on  
a necklace of severed ears  
he took from it.  
he smiled  
and said sometimes he liked to leave them outside  
in the summer  
to see the images within them in the dew.  
he did not go to church with his wife  
he said it was too late  
and that was his belief  
for all those  
who had been abandoned  
by religion  
for his necklace.  
he laughed at the end of his story  
the way i could not imagine  
laughing.

to travel further.  
wf.h.  
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