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Daughter

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Daughter

for Zoe-Kate, age 14 months

The guy installing our new washing machine
must have weighed 350 pounds,
his coveralls, thick thumbs, three-day stubble
badges of manliness I could only envy,
but he still went all goo-goo-ga-ga
over my daughter's piggy tails.

He tested every cycle
from cold-cold to hot-hot,
permanent press to delicate, then turned
serious and offered advice for someday
when she's bringing home boys:

*Do like the dad of this girl
I dated, put a shotgun shell on the kitchen table
with their name on it.
That'll show 'em don't touch your daughter.*

I've learned
when you are a father of a daughter
it is assumed
you see yourself as keeper
of the keys to the chastity belt.

A fool from the start,
at her birth I pledged
never to be fool enough to confuse
my desire for hers
which already has set a course toward the sun.

catching the summer's first breeze
to sail away like cottonwood seeds.
Hurrying's

her favorite thing,
worrying mine, following from room to room,
danger never farther
than bottom step,
coffee table's killer corner,
a wide world of things small enough to choke on.

Watching her
climb one exhausting stair after another.
her eyes like blue dimes
when she turns to check if I'm still behind her,

I wonder

who dreams of a life untouched?
Who would wish this on another?

Amorak Huey worked as a newspaper reporter and editor for fifteen years, most recently as Assistant Sports Editor at The Grand Rapids Press. This fall he left journalism for a position as Visiting Professor of Writing at Grand Valley State University. "Sept. 11, 2004" originally appeared in Crab Orchard Review.