

[this is as young as Fast Red Road ever was. Wrote it deep in the morning after having just — for reasons which escaped me as I was saying them — lied hard to this important editor about how I'd written this novel, and it was beautiful & perfect etc. so I figured I needed to get something down on paper anyway. this was early august, 1997. —sgj]

Golias, A Failing Sestina

A Love Enema

In the beginning there was the word coming crackly over the p.a., help me, please, he's got a gun, then click, nothing. It was in the shoplifting silence that followed when Sherry who liked to be called Ann for short and K for shorter first saw Golias in black and white on the tabloid, naked save an elongated fuzzy box. It interested her, that box. Below it the salamander boy saga continued. K had a heart for these things. She stole it. She sat on the curb and the wet gunshots rolled across the parking lot and ran the light and lost themselves in midday traffic. It was a lonely sound, a man starting his dying, but oh well. She didn't have to listen. Instead she drank the tainted cough syrup from her purse and it worked its way down to her uterus where swam almond eyed twins each of the same night, different father. They were sick she told herself, needed some medicine, sleep. When the dogs finally came for her out of the sun like they did every day around three or so she was ready and they were as polite as can be expected. She was reading about Golias whom she would someday need like she needed it to rain and wash the bus smell out of her hair. Her smile, the tip of her tongue.

Inside though, the grocery store, the assistant manager dragged himself down aisle seven, gritting his teeth and saying it doesn't matter if he pulls a few soup cans down behind him, it doesn't matter about the blood on the floor. There's always the mopboy. Because it was because it *is* a Wednesday the senior citizens mill around with coupons licked to their foreheads so as not to forget. The assistant manager tries to make a mouth noise but it comes out wet and bubbly and he remembers the grainy picture he saw once of a south american amphibian that could breathe through its skin. It lived in a pool on a mountain and it may have been the only one left. Relict was the word. He crawls and he tries tries hard to open his pores wide enough to learn. An old man on a cane sees him through coke bottle glasses and he's a blue apron far away, three inches long. He grabs his wife by her shirt sleeve and says he hasn't seen a salamander in a grocery store for nigh on fifteen years now. She corrects him—What about that time in 88? He smiles and nods and it's all coming back now, all at once.

At home on the can for two hours deep into the night he'll be watching tv and drinking the gallon jug of doctor's orders, cleaning his insides out for the speedometer cable treatment. The weight of the world running through him. He will never have felt so empty, so smooth inside, and when his wife brings him rusty tapwater so he won't dehydrate she will not have been in love with him now for thirty two years, since the ice cube incident. He will tell no he *tells* her thank you, doll, and she whispers to him how much money they saved today on prunes. She never says his name anymore, and that's what he hears most of everything, that empty space where it used to be. When the national anthem's over and he's done crying for his country and done drinking the shitwater and done with everything he picks up the tabloid that blew up against his feet in the parking lot. On the cover there's a young man with a long black fuzzy penis, and inside is the true story of how he got it. He smiles, the old man, there was a time.

It could have been any of five different things, the woman reporter says on pages 17-18, but whatever the case, it all comes together in a dry lake bed somewhere outside Lubbock Texas, where things can happen have happened and still do happen. She's talking about the salamander boy, Caliban, how she saw his father swimming in formaldehyde in a curio shop before the big earthquake of Mexico City, when the world came apart at the seams. She likes to talk more about him because she's watched Jimmy O the photographer manipulate the negatives into cover pieces. It's magic, but it's a magic she knows. Not like the Golias story, the five things that might have come together for a moment when no one was looking. She makes careful sentences about the surface of it but under her words there exists there existed there was once a man crawling on his belly down an aisle towards the smoky cooler lights, there was something in a pickle jar and it had to be an animal, it couldn't be two fetuses making sloe eyes at each other and moving their mouths in a story about the mute boy who walks behind with a mop and doesn't listen, but sees, sees in every spilled jar the shape that once was.

At night when the managers are gone when the managers *were* gone he was alone on the pharmaceutical aisle, and there was the cough syrup, and here was the webbed place between his thumb and forefinger where the mop rubbed it raw, and here was the cough syrup, sickly sweet, the same color almost. It could make anything better. He believed. He didn't hear when god spoke to him out of the tiled ceiling. He had once opened one of the tabloids in a moment of weakness and already seen the way it all starfished together, and for that the birds came in his sleep and pulled out the roots of his tongue and fed it to their children. He awaits the return of taste. He makes promises he can never keep. He mops up the afterbirth of another death behind the grocery store with his head down and he talks to no one about dogs, but in the night the shape comes together and there's Golias telling the old man his Uncle Birdfinger the only thing he really knows, about how he found his father dead one day, just dead, his lips all swollen up and wrong colored, which is the first thing.
