

Casual Violence in Sunday School

Gregory Brooks

John the Baptist was a hairy scorpion
who skittered out from the wilderness
and began stinging folks
until they saw the Holy Ghost.

He molted like all prophets do,
lived in caves, under rocks,
until the predators found him—
took his mandibles, his head.

A dove landed in the blood,
tracked little vees across the stones.
We the ones who hear the story,
some of us too terrified to speak,

we wonder when the martyrdom
will slice our way.
And why our fathers sharpen
knives below the pew.

Emphasis on death, on liquid pride
dripping down a hanging tree.
Carry a sword, perhaps of words.
Defend, find prestige in priesthood might.

We were children when we heard
decapitation was the only course
to save the world. Just kids when
Haun's Mill came out on VHS.

I stayed up every night after my baptism,
wringing my hands, worried God
would command me to kill—
and if he did, how I would shrink.