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## Hard Times, Arkansas

CL Bledsoe

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# Hard Times, Arkansas

They weren't all bad, those angry years.  
I've mostly forgotten the taste of sawdust  
meant to keep the belly from swelling too  
noticeably, though the smell of want  
on my own skin never quite washes away.  
There was laughter, not all at my own  
expense, though I was a dancing monkey  
when I smelled change, I admit. There  
were days when she smiled and danced  
in her panties when no one could see  
but me. There was fire in the veins  
and the gut. Genius spat into camp  
fires. Drugs were cheap and plentiful  
and none of us had obligations in the morning.  
There was no tomorrow, in Hard Times,  
so why bother? All of our fathers hated  
the sight of us the same, so no one felt  
slighted. All of us would've helped bury  
a body for the others, though none of us  
owned a shovel. Still, we were used  
to stealing from hardware stores.

## About CL Bledsoe

CL Bledsoe is the author of five novels including the young adult novel *Sunlight*, the novels *Last Stand in Zombietown* and *\$7.50/hr + Curses*; four poetry collections: *Riceland*, *\_\_\_\_\_ (Want/Need)*, *Anthem*, and *Leap Year*; and a short story collection called *Naming the Animals*. A poetry chapbook, *Goodbye to Noise* and [The Man Who Killed Himself in My Bathroom](#).

He's been nominated for the Pushcart Prize 8 times, had 2 stories selected as Notable Stories by Story South's Million Writers Award and 2 others nominated, and has been nominated for Best of the Net twice. He blogs at [Murder Your Darlings](#). Bledsoe reviews regularly for *Rain Taxi*, *Coal Hill Review*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Monkey Bicycle*, *Book Slut*, *The Hollins Critic*, *The Arkansas Review*, *American Book Review*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, and elsewhere. Bledsoe lives with his wife and daughter in Maryland.