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The Book

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The Book

"Your cheatin' heart. . ." bleating
in cracked vinyl booths—
Ox Bridge Bar & Family Restaurant—
accompanies wads of paper, fallen
from the grace of the walls of
dead letter & clerk post office.

I fall, but then everybody falls.
In bitter plywood stalls they tell
me you will come in the burnt-neck
town of Paradise, West Virginia,
where the wolf man with a booger
in his mustache talks about libbers.

I find you in the dumpster
with gravy under your fingernails.
The XENOPHOBE is out of order;
MS. PAC-MAN waits for the sonic
freight train to spill her pot
of quarters. Outside a wind-blown

sailor steps in a puddle. A
hemlock plume rolls from the coffee;
the fry-cook smells like rain &
doom & gasoline. A guy with a tiny
little head says, "It ain't safe
to hitchhike unless you have no

place to go." Out front some guy's
peeing in a pay phone. The woman with
the rude kid buttons her collar.
Perfume rolls out the red carpet
for the girl with the coke
bottle glasses. Then she rolls up

in it & disappears. I write, "*Truth
is just five letters bluffing like a
band of poker.*" Then I erase it & lie.
Suddenly, I'm eating a grilled cheese
sandwich with a stain on top from a
ruffled pickle. "Let me take you

upstairs to the hole above the bar.
You load the gun & I'll sleep
in the car." The scientist says to
mushroom soup that the wind on
Neptune blows a thousand miles an hour.
I fall asleep in my book, thinking
you are that metaphor, wanting to
hide in the MEN room. Some fella
hears second hand that his poof-haired
girlfriend is a liar, he turns purple
& falls off his stool. I read
your résumé written with a Barlow

knife. They said you were coming to
loosen up this joint. I
didn't recognize you, not even
when you told me about the bed;
you didn't ring a bell. I never
would have known you by your name.

I'm told you left the moment that you came

-Matt Wanat '95