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My Father

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My Father

My father, piston of muscle
& bone, hook for a left hand,
courtesy of combine, once
picked up a Volkswagen
while some woman changed
her tire. Then he smoked
a cigarette. Short & thin,
hardened & scarred, when
the kicker on the bailer broke
& the gate on the wagon jammed
he threw tightly packed bails
high over the sides in the
dry sun of second cutting,
rationed his water, smoked
a Marlboro, & ate dinner
at 10 pm. On the oiled dirt
floor of the shop, he lifted
an engine off of Uncle Tim's
arm, standing like an ape
in the hood of a bleached
Trans Am. He had egg yoke
& butter in his veins as he
syphoned gas & spit on the
stained ground. When a big
German Shepherd attacked him
he stuck a Camel in its eye,

killed it with one punch from
his gravel fist. Sunburns
like rings in trees, he caught
the neighbor's stud; it kicked
& broke his ribs, & when he fell
off the barn roof he drove
himself to the ER while the
fields waited anxiously. Once,
cigar bobbing in his cursing
teeth as he hammered a wrench
with his left wrist trying
to get the starter off of the
old Ford tractor, WD 40 staining
his hand & hook yellow, he
knocked the tractor into gear
& the slanted treads climbed
his back before he hit the
clutch & he didn't even kneel.
When I saw him yesterday he
couldn't even breathe. They
took his one lung out & the
other had a hole in it the size
of the one his fist put in the
barn door.

—Matt Wanat '95