

Ode to Hardware Stores
by Barbara Hamby

Where have all the hardware stores gone — dusty, sixty-watt
warrens with the wood floors, cracked linoleum,
poured concrete painted blood red? Where are Eppes, Terry Rossa
Yon's, Flint — low buildings on South Monroe,
Eight Avenue, Gaines Street with their scent of paint thinner,
pesticides, plastic hoses coiled like serpents
in a garden paradisaal with screws in buckets or bins
against a brick wall with hand-lettered signs
in ball-point pen — Carriage screws, two dozen for fifty cents —
long vicious dry-wall screws, thick wood screws
like peasants digging potatoes in fields, thin elegant trim
screws— New York dames at a backwoods hick
Sunday School picnic. O universal clevis pins, seven holes
in the shank, like the seven deadly sins.
Where are the men — Mr. Franks, Mr. Piggot, Tyrone, Hank,
Ralph — sunburnt with stomachs and no asses,
men who knew the mythology of nails, Zeuses enthroned
on an Olympus of weak coffee, bad haircuts,
and tin cans of galvanized casting nails, sinker nails, brads,
20-penny common nails, duplex head nails, flooring nails
like railroad spikes, finish nails, fence staples, cotter pins,
roofing nails — flat-headed as Floyd Crawford,
who lived next door to you for years but would never say hi
or make eye contact. What a career in hardware
he could have had, his blue-black hair slicked back with brilliantine,
rolling a toothpick between his teeth while sorting
screw eyes and carpet tacks. Where are the hardware stores,
open Monday through Friday, Saturday till two?
No night hours here, like physicists their universe mathematical
and pure in its way: dinner at six, Rawhide at eight,
lights out at ten, kiss in the dark, up at five for the subatomic world
of toggle bolts, cap screws, hinch-pin clips, split-lock
washers. And the tools — saws, rakes, wrenches, rachets, drills,
chisels, and hose heads, hose couplings, sandpaper
(garnet, production, wet or dry), hinges, wire nails, caulk, nuts,
lag screws, pulleys, vise grips, hexbolts, fender washers
all in a primordial stew of laconic talk about football, baseball,
who'll start for the Dodgers, St. Louis, the Phillies,

the Cubs? Walk around the block today and see their ghosts:
abandoned lots, graffitti'd windows, and tacked
to backroom walls, pin-up calendars almost decorous
in our porn-riddled galaxy of Walmarts, Seven-Elevens,
stripmalls like strip mines or a carrion bird's curved beak
gobbling farms, meadows, wildflowers, drowsy afternoons
of nothing to do but watch dust motes dance through a streak
of sunlight in a darkened room. If there's a second coming,
I want angels called Lem, Nelson, Rodney, and Cletis gathered
around a bin of nails, their silence like hosannahs,
hallelujahs, amens swelling from cinderblock cathedrals
drowning our cries of Bigger, faster, more, more, more.