

# CHAPEL CARTER IS THE INVENTOR OF THE NAIL CLIPPER

Keith S. Wilson

Is he crouching under  
this sloping chrome, clothes  
laid out among the smoke  
of a small fire to keep warm by,  
breathless again beneath  
the busy bypass  
of this cold metal frame?

In the house he built,  
his name flirting with forget  
even in his own home.

Or does he line his labor  
like apples and pears  
along the lint-lined clip  
of this window frame?

Narrow and wide, it opens  
and closes like an aching heart,  
a dying fish. Fingered by keratin  
as if to clear the passage  
for air. Over and over  
again. Tight-fisted groups of ten;  
decades of tries only pretending  
to save a life.

# CLIPPERS, AS TENDS TO HAPPEN, LOST IN MODERNISM

It's not too abstract,  
is it? the nail clippers  
as a dead bird,  
flopped over, a single wing  
folded on its back,  
asleep like flamingoes do,  
head twisted uncomfortably backwards  
(which seconds ago  
was the wing, but this  
is how art goes, drifting  
on the wind,  
inspiration as ephemeral  
as the leftover ice  
that lives into the spring,  
and this surrealism,  
such a thing  
that we aspire to:  
modern poets,  
pretending as if our dreams  
fit on paper,  
or that anything we've ever said  
comes close  
to the frightening  
and indescribable ability  
of colors and places and things  
to acid meld together  
like sloppy watercolors  
into a mud  
we somehow know  
isn't mud at all, but is instead our brother,  
or our mother when she was young,  
or the fifth grade teacher  
who said in front of everyone  
that you weren't even as strong as a girl  
long before you knew  
why it should be a stupid thing  
to be mad about)  
anyway, the point is

that it's a dead bird. I haven't  
the inclination, tonight,  
to cut my toe nails.

# WHAT DOES A NAIL CLIPPER IN MEETING A MOLE?

Alcohol swabbed. Seconds here from  
a quick snip. The end  
of a connection. So what if  
my brother uses his to open bags of snacks  
or for cutting wire? Witness  
the troughs of scars set in the face  
of his trimmers. They keep well  
even outside  
of the confines of their creation.

But even here, folded neatly for a pocket  
in my own set  
of intended actions: a dullness resides  
seeming like the sudden replacement of a fresh  
relationship, fingerprints steadfast  
against reflection: complicated relationships  
with the crescent  
moon. Is it coming or going? Does it matter  
to anybody but the sweaty backs of the waves?  
Those fingerprints  
obvious once noticed. Like something lewd.  
The grease of wet skin so intent at contact,  
if only for the sake of separation.

It is most times merely  
a place vibrating silently in the atmosphere,  
among a dozen other things not worth thinking on,  
the same color and breed as gunmetal.  
Innocent like a bullet's round, balded  
head, smooth and flat  
and colder, somehow, than the environment  
where it lays silent in its cold stew.

Your importance is unimportant. It may change  
in a breath, spirited  
by the wide and rabid wish for life,  
but your manna sinks,  
perhaps randomly, from the sky

like fish food. You may ask for it,  
you may receive it. Or you may starve.

# MORTALITY AND NAIL CLIPPERS

It is time for more formal acquaintance  
between us, who spend weeks always  
within reach and pondering one another.

I am a man, and there is little else  
to say but that I'm much alike all men.

But you, my clippers, are a little under  
two inches long, and comprised of three parts.

First, your pinched vowel body, second your lever,  
and third the center tooth connecting the others  
like a counselor, yawning precisely as a piston.

The light reflects fingerprints on your moderately  
smudged chrome. Some grime is in your teeth.

Form under function, you've no place for the  
swiveling blade of a nail file, but instead  
a hole on the end opposite the more utilitarian  
side, open as a hand for a keychain or a string.

The heavy lever is humpbacked, a depression set  
for the comfort of an ignorant thumb, and  
striations on the body; parallel lines  
hugging each side, and on the inset depression  
of the lever as well, for the sake of beauty.

But be that another man made you, and not  
for beauty's sake alone—or solely for pleasure—  
and being also that you didn't spring  
miraculously from the press of space or nature,  
I have little more to say about you even  
for your own sake, for I have spent on you already  
more time than any power would grant me.