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Category: Poetry

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## Places

Every place is mean, if you look in the heart of it,  
every place and all its people, all its people and all their sons.

I was born in Weirton, West Virginia,  
out by the steel mill,  
where the muck greets the grass,  
and the coal pours into the river.  
West Virginia looks kind enough--  
the people old and withered,  
with clouded eyes and meth-teeth,  
but they smile nonetheless.  
West Virginia is ugly on the inside,  
once you stare at the water long enough  
to realize it is not clear.  
Once you notice that every pretty mountain  
comes to a sharp point.  
Once you stay long enough to realize that  
meth rots more than teeth.

I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee,  
where every bird sings, be it a songbird or not,  
under a sun that never sets,  
that even warms in the winter.  
The people of Memphis are a choir  
and they murmur soul so pretty  
at the gas stations and corner stores  
that you cannot decipher a scream.  
But it is somber music--  
no matter how sweet it sounds.  
To know Memphis is to love Memphis  
and to leave it too.  
Once you walk the streets  
when the songbirds sleep.  
Once you witness a day  
that the Mississippi runs red.  
Once you peak over the bluff  
and see that it is no longer blue.

Every place is mean and worn, ugly and unforgiving,  
once you know it well enough, once you meet the men that call it home.