

MICHAEL ALLEN

Streetlight

We pushed the smooth wood handles,
David and me, the clippings sprayed
back from the mower over our sneakers,
small legs pushing through his thick yard.
A long row, then our four hands heaved
wheels and blades over, pulled the mower
behind us, blades flicking grass high
in the air sounding like helicopters
as we ran back to start the push again.
It was a game, like all summer
in the Cincinnati heat and sweat,
like who could slide like Pete
or smile like Perez. Some parents
laughed by the curb, some kids
played tag between our houses
of white board and brick, kept fiercely neat.

Two kids tossed green fists
of the cut above their heads, all
over: they stood arms outstretched,
necks hunched and surprised—grass
didn't hit but fluttered about
like little wings without birds and
you could hear all the evening chirping
as the streetlight came on.

The machine was all clatter behind us,
like locust or shadow getting larger.
Little Steve ran in the green spray,
kicking up the new stuff, getting his shoes
green in the cool green air.
We pulled hard when a small stick
jammed the blades, making our legs
push at the ground, like big runners.
But we looked around, saw Steve reaching
for his top middle finger, lost.
The the air felt fast, our hearts
loud in our heads, everything
grayer and darker, parents coming.

And Dave and Danny there with me and
yes we were talking, laughing, not looking
no we didn't know how dark it got
all of a sudden, night standing
around us cold on our bare legs

grass damp on our shoes, in our hair.
We stared forward through bodies
standing around us and the houses,
red brick and curtained windows, hit
hard by the streetlight, were so puny
that the hurt settled in to stay.