

DAVID WAGONER

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*Nick*

Suddenly he'd be standing on the corner  
In front of us, Nick Martich, who was twenty  
Or thirty or forty, still wearing that shirt  
(Out of somebody's ragbag or handed down  
From the father we couldn't imagine) and those pants  
(Pressed into permanent wrinkles by whatever  
Had spilled on him lately) and those red suspenders  
(Hiking him up high while he bobbed and weaved  
Like a boxer). One arm was strong. It could make a fist.  
It could straighten and point. It could shove itself  
Into his pants pocket and dig down  
For his latest news—a name, an address, a key,  
Or half a candy bar—and the other was dead,  
Boneless, almost elastic, with raw, red knuckles,  
And he could swing it like a living whip  
By swiveling his hips. It would sweep around  
And slap his own back with a thud. Listen,  
He'd knocked out so-and-so and so-and-so  
Like that, and just like that, he would thump it  
Against a telephone pole or a brick wall  
And tell you to go ahead, smart-ass,  
Stick a knife in it. With his good hand  
He'd jam it into his pocket, take it out,  
And jam it in again. He didn't have time  
To stick around a bunch of fucking kids  
Going to grade school who none of us didn't know  
Which fucking end was up. He showed us a cundrum  
And not no fucking balloon. We were too stupid

To know about cundrums or what they were for.  
They were for fucking girls. We tried to imagine  
What fucking girls were for as he limped away  
To meet somebody important, his stiff back  
Tilting and straightening, his curly hair  
As tight as springs, his harelip puckered  
To whistle us a song about what was up.