

Kevin Rabas

From the Suburbs

“The gray of the suburbs wasn’t like the gray of the city.” –Nathan Biller, “The Rain Man”

Adrienne studied white flight, urged
the strong and talented, whatever color,
to stay in the city, make it better.
Forget Chicago or NYC. Stay in KC.
She wrote a thesis on it, at Amherst,
but never published. She wrote
a short chapter on me, in the suburbs
section, thought I’d never forgive her.
I said, Nothing to forgive.

Michael

The cat’s paw would tap at the record as it spun,
my sister’s first LP. It’s Michael’s voice
full of white fabric and silver sequins,
and beneath him those feet that can damn near do
anything, pop up to a toe point, sneak backwards
to a roll, a wave of ankle and hip and shoe,
that moonwalk move. We all tried it,
on carpet, on tile, on linoleum, on concrete,
and on skates; that dancer, that singer,
he spun us, and like the needle on the record,
we would not let go. We were just kids,
and he was there ahead of us, in that hot light,
having danced, outdistanced his brothers.
We watched his record spin; we sung along.
First black man we’d seen who was always
on tv. We rethought our dreams, took up
breakdancing, picked up skateboards, held hands
of other colors—and only later did we look and see
how much further Michael had gone: oxygen
bed, pet monkey, blanket son held over
the balcony, and face changed: whitened, nose
shrunk and slim. He looked more like my mother
than Michael then, but we still watched him, still listened
for some last ripple of Motown: *Ma Ma Se, Ma Ma Sa,
Ma Ma Coo Sa, Ma Ma Se, Ma Ma Sa, Ma Ma Coo Sa:*
I wanna sing that song that Michael sung.

Kevin Rabas co-directs the creative writing program at Emporia State University and edits *Flint Hills Review*. His stories and poems have been published in *Nimrod*, *Cottonwood*, *Event*, and elsewhere. He has three books: *Bird's Horn*, *Lisa's Flying Electric Piano*, a Kansas Notable Book and Nelson Poetry Book Award winner, and *Spider Face: stories*.