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December 2014

## from Artifacts of an Earlier Self

Reginald Gibbons

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### Recommended Citation

Gibbons, Reginald (2014) "from Artifacts of an Earlier Self," *Ontario Review*: Vol. 12, Article 8.

Available at: <http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview/vol12/iss1/8>

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# From *Artifacts of an Earlier Self*

REGINALD GIBBONS

## The Dream

At the edge of the thicket  
you hesitate and I lead  
  
the way in. After a long walk  
we sit for a while on a log  
  
and suck at the canteen,  
watch a big rattler slide across the trail.  
  
You smile at my fear, memory breathes  
on the gray coals in you and they glow red.  
  
Is this the way? I ask.  
You nod and point deeper into the trees  
  
along a sandy path you knew as a boy.  
You appear as a boy,  
  
a hot rain is falling, you chew pine resin,  
your eyes grow darker, your muddy hopes  
  
boil away in the summer sun.  
You take a photograph from your pocket  
  
and we enter it: now you are a baby  
in your father's arms, you wait  
  
to be put back down on the porch  
of the new house, where behind the railing  
  
other faces peek at the lens—  
your cousins, soon to find

you their favorite, much-used toy.  
The stifling light

of the sepia print is dripping  
from the trees around us, seived through

pinés, sinking into  
the musky earth. It is time to go on.

Through thigh-stinging underbrush I  
break the old trail open,

heading for the house and artesian well.  
Beside a stump, your father appears, and he

argues with his father, it is 1910, he wants  
a place of his own, and the old man,

who rode down from Arkansas to homestead  
long before this time, cedes him

a section. They build the house,  
your father picks you up,

an itinerant photographer produces this  
memento. . . . You pocket it again and point

a new direction, while around us  
the gatekeepers lie, jewels

glittering along their serpentine spines,  
black heads yawning

## *The Magician's Wife*

DEBBY WYNNE

with a hiss, needles ready  
in a bed of clean cotton: you are twelve still,

you stub a bare toe  
hunting squirrels with a sling;

for a while you hold your eyes  
on the trees, then in pain

you return to that place to see  
nearly buried in the road's white dust

the thick dozing body whose fangs  
you had taken for a thorn.

Your mother appears, she says you  
are not to run, but to walk home.

They cut you with a razor, put  
your foot in a bucket of kerosene,

a week passes, and then her young  
half-Indian features fade

as, ever softer, she sings  
you to sleep in a rocker. . . .

The doves, their calls muffled  
in the heat, pass out of our hearing now.

We come into the clearing, I step away  
to let you be the first to see again

after fifty years the first place  
you knew. Blackberry, high weeds

and a crab-apple tree rise  
where the well might be.

Beyond that, in ragged scrub,  
the ruin sags, two sharp-toothed window-frames

smashed at the chimney's ankles,  
bubbly glass and brick, a heap of rubbish

surrounded by thick stands of stubby pines.  
You stop and I stand beside you.

Now, as I begin to cry, you speak.