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## From "Life Stories"

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## From "Life Stories"

-Paul Hetherington

### 1. Monterey Cypress

At the bottom of the oval  
the twisted Monterey Cypress  
was a green-fringed broken  
corkscrew  
where we climbed to hide  
from the furious history teacher.  
He was looking for the culprits  
who'd chalked "liar" on the board  
after he'd praised  
America's cause in Vietnam.  
Next to it we buried  
childish, risqué comics;  
nearby a broken drain  
drizzled a stale aroma  
like old washing-up  
onto frothing soil  
and the curved tongue-and-groove  
of the gardener's shed  
leaked smoke and whisky smells.  
Under that Monterey  
we found a clump of  
mushrooms—  
*Agaricus bisporus*—  
growing in the grass:  
upturned, pale boats,  
bulbous, taut umbrellas  
with tender brownish struts—  
and you, at twelve, plucked five.  
Sautéd lavishly in butter  
in a shimmering smooth-black pan,  
releasing and gathering  
their copious, staining moisture,  
the woody, earthy flavours  
soaked our crunchy toast.  
Only afterwards did we read  
that, all too often, *Agaricus*  
was mistaken for *Amanita*,  
the notorious *Destroying Angel*,  
even by experts—an imposter  
with its own exquisite taste,  
purveyor of organ failure.

### 2. Bombs

One of my father's stories  
could have been a parable:  
last from a mess hut  
in Darwin during the war  
he faced a line of Japanese bombs  
with the slit trenches' protection  
an impossible short distance away.  
There was a moment  
of seeing his own oblivion,  
and, perhaps, because of his lapsed  
Catholicism,  
an aura of an afterlife  
as death ambled near  
in clumping, explosive steps.  
His training had taught him  
to lie on the ground  
and, after bombs fell either side  
and dirt sprayed his helmet,  
to the surprise of his mates  
he stood up, pale but cheery,  
saying something they didn't catch.