

## Uncle Wyatt

The only stores Wyatt ever patronized were pawn shops; thus, for my father's graduation from high school, Wyatt gave him a pair of army surplus field glasses he had rummaged from a back-street shop a week earlier. Years later, sitting in the rain at old Municipal Stadium, my father told me that Wyatt's real name was Conrad. He could not explain the derivative. But back in 1956, Conrad accepted my father's hand, outstretched in gratitude, not only for the field glasses, but also for taking him in when my grandfather's drinking turned the old patriarch into a maimed and odorous grizzly who struck with ugly black claws; and for the ticket to game three of the '48 series where Larry Doby's third inning home run landed just a few rows from their bleacher seats; and for the rhubarb pies Hadley, Wyatt's third wife, sliced across the middle and split between them as they recovered from August afternoons cross-stacking bales of green alfalfa in dusty hay lofts; and for the Guernsey cream, skimmed off the top of wide-mouth gallon jugs, in which Conrad suggested my father drown his pie; and for the rope-frame bed and the rag mattress to lay on it that Conrad salvaged from St. Andrew's basement after receiving the blessing of the Monsignor; and for the grape soda Conrad purchased for him after the deflated crowd, they amongst them, moved away from the black and white television sets in the downtown store window, still disbelieving that Wertz could hit a ball over four-hundred feet and Mays could catch it; and for the lessons learned on those cold morning milkings when ice skims would form over the full buckets before they could empty them into the tank; and for being a man; and for all that remained unspoken, even unthought, but known, known the way the tomato knows its seeds and the locust knows its boughs; yet, not even those field glasses possessed the magnification to foresee that September day, nine years into the future, before my father would beget his own children, before Neil Armstrong would expand the universe, before Vietnam would finish slashing the wound which would heal into a national scar, before the first

season since '59 that the Indians would finish ahead of the Yankees, when Conrad, with wiry chin hairs below his dentured mouth, shirtless and doughy, attired in threadbare blue pajama bottoms strapped at the waist and one matted brown slipper, would designate my father a son-of-a-bitch bastard and lob a feeble fist at his sagging brown eyes; but by then my father understood aging and how things are lost.