

2021

A Rusty

Michael McFee

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/bpr>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), and the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McFee, Michael (2021) "A Rusty," *Birmingham Poetry Review*. Vol. 48, Article 46.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/bpr/vol48/iss2021/46>

This content has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the UAB Digital Commons, and is provided as a free open access item. All inquiries regarding this item or the UAB Digital Commons should be directed to the [UAB Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication](#).

Michael McFee

A Rusty

“He’s sure cuttin’ a rusty,” she said, flatly,

my parents’ elderly neighbor gazing down
at our furious toddler bawling and howling

and wallowing in Saturday afternoon weeds.

I’d never heard that phrase. It sounded right
for this kid cutting up on her uncut lawn,

the two *uhs* making their low vowel ruckus

in the mouth, the uplifted terminal *-ty*
an open-ended scream after the tiniest hiss.

That night, in my childhood bed and bedroom,

breathing quietly beside my Piedmont wife,
our red-faced son finally spent and asleep,

I remembered growing up on this steep street

with a kid named Rusty, a weird, dirty boy
who ate dirt and even (on a dare) little rocks.

Was the neighbor recalling his gravelly yowls

as he rolled on the ground, clutching his belly?
She moved from a mountain cove to that suburb,

to be near her own come-to-town offspring.

Maybe she learned the phrase in Bloody Madison
among “the rustics,” as one book called them,

uncouth highlanders pitchin’ their hissy fits,

playin’ the fool anytime the fancy took them,
drinkin’ moonshine and firin’ off their rifles.

“Unsophisticated boisterous misbehavior”—

ain’t that what them ignorant hillbillies do?
Did I ever cut a rusty? I can’t ask my parents:

they’ve been dead longer than I’d been alive

that day their rowdy grandson kept capering
at the feet of an implacable country woman.

Maybe I should rip one off if my doctor ever

delivers terminal news, falling to the tile floor,
“engaging in a grotesque, frolicsome action,”

loudly bewailing the fate I’ve just been dealt

but secretly enjoying this melodramatic scene,
this acting out, this performance, this encore

cloudburst before I conclude the conniption,

then rise to smooth out my clothes and smile,
bowing, shaking his cold hand, saying, *So long*.