

Drum

by Brian Bell

I often wondered
when it came time
for my father to retire
to sell the old building
that before it was his business,
his father's business
was a warehouse for an ice cream company,
if there was some sentimentality about the old place.

Raised on the second floor
above his father's auto repair shop,
he became his father,
owner of the business,
even answering to his father's name
that remained on the lighted sign
and business cards, but was not his own.

He supported a family of five children
with the tools he kept there;
though he never showed a passion for it.
Eventually he was alone there.
His lone legacy employee, a nephew,
left angry one day, did not return.
His wife, my mother, his secretary
died one October in view of that
retirement they both anticipated.

Not long after,
while moving a 50-gallon
drum of oil, rolling it on its rim,
the weight of it shifted,
trapping his bottom hand between the
tilted rim and another barrel,
slicing the meat from his finger tips
like grated swiss.

He wrapped his hand in a towel,
Telephoned to cancel the pizza
he had ordered minutes before,
drove himself to the hospital.
When the doctors were done
dressing his hand,
he returned to finish putting
brakes on a customer's car.

Yes I wonder if the smell of
paint thinner and oil, dust and rubber
that perfumed his uniform
when I was boy had penetrated his body, his soul.
as it had mine.

Does he hear the hollow
echos of his footsteps in that
cavernous garage when he sleeps,
calling him back to the life that once was.
I wonder, but I never ask.