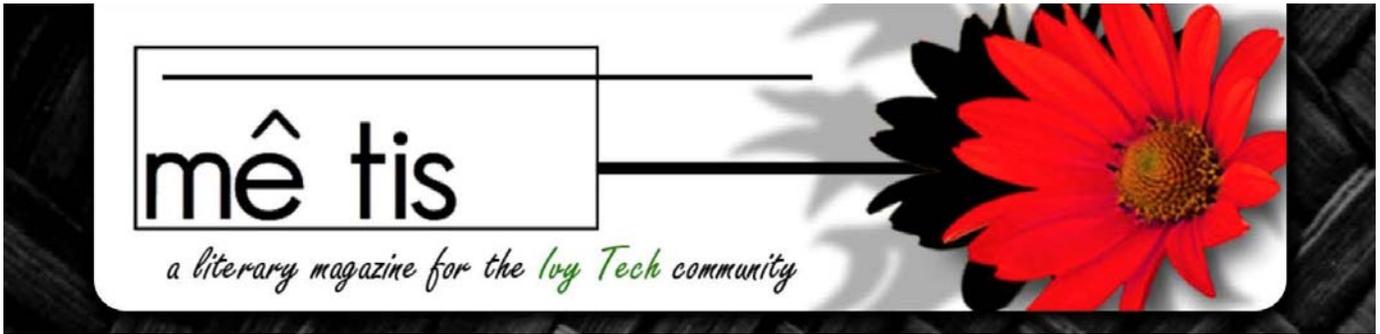


## **The Lowboy**

**By Clay Greer**

My wife forbids me to smoke in the house and forbids me to drink Wild Turkey anywhere. Because of this, every afternoon at sunset, I tell her I am going to work in the garden, and she pretends not to know that really what I am going to do is pull a not-too-well-hidden bottle from a milk can and sit in the garden and smoke and drink. I was sitting in my garden drinking bourbon and smoking camel studs and watching a fat polluted sunset and listening to the cawing of greasy crows who were circling the new shoots of tom when my long time friend and neighbor began to chop the chest of drawers in his backyard to splinters with a splitting maul. The black walnut lowboy had sat ignored for a cycle of seasons and something about that day made Zig decide he could ignore it no more.

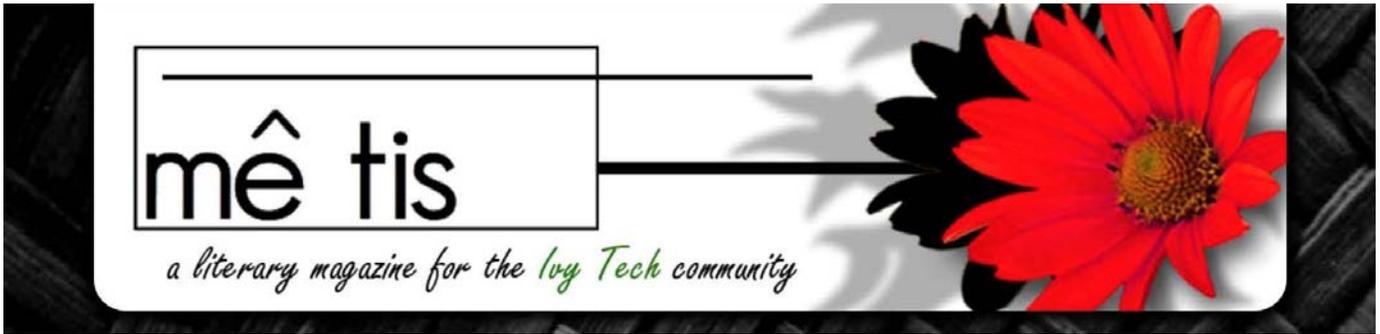
The black walnut dresser was ageless in my mind. An heirloom of Zig's family, built by his Great Grandfather, the Greek immigrant, who had built custom furniture for Boston blue bloods and had made and drank away a fortune, according to Zig's Grandma. And when she died the dresser went to Zig, and the antique appraiser had said it was worth ten grand minimum in the right market, and I had said that he should sell the lowboy because ten grand beats moving the heavy bastard, and Zig said we were too old to be strong but too young to admit it and when the time came he would sell it to help pay for Kinsey's college. Later that day, Zig is on his



knees on the blacktop, holding Kinsey's head, and, with each breath out, I can see pink bubbles at her nostrils, and I can see the blood vessels in her eyes swelling and popping like fireworks until the whites all turn red, and behind the screams and the cries and Kinsey's mom yelling and my heartbeat in my ears and the sirens and behind everything is the unsteady tempo and warble of children's music played too loud through a cheap tin speaker.

So it was a bad idea because college was not meant for Kinsey, or Kinsey was not meant for college. Any ice-cream man can tell you, rich kids go to college and poor kids get ice cream, or rich kids become rich adults and poor kids become poor adults, or rich kids get tomorrow and poor kids get today. So Kinsey should have gotten an ice cream from the truck, and she should have been pregnant by sixteen and have gotten married to a boy with calloused hands and gone to work at a truck stop or mill and done the things our people do and have always done, and Zig should have sold the goddamn lowboy.

I watched the maul punch holes in the polished wood, tearing apart in minutes what had been months in the making and was built to last the ages, as long as the bloodline, and was now decades older than the maul or the man who swung it, destroying what had sat emotionless through the winter, buried beneath the same foot of Midwest snow as Kinsey's grave and my garden and what was unmoved and blameless, while I drank bourbon in the garage and thought and worried over my friend who had gone to bed in late summer and had not been awake yet this winter.



I sat in my garden with my studs and my whiskey in a white plastic lawn chair from the stack on the back deck and watched. I smoked and drank and watched my friend scream as he smashed and cut and split the drawers. I listened to Zig yell murder, murder, murder, and cuss until his voice gave out, and I watched him rid the world of the black walnut lowboy, until he couldn't lift the maul, and then he knelt down in the ruins and put his bloody hands to his face and cried.

And when I saw Zig was done with the splitting maul and that he was only going to cry, I dumped the whiskey into the tilled black soil and crushed the stud under my right heel, and I drug my plastic chair back to the porch and went inside because there are some drawers a man has to empty alone.

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Clay is an Auto Worker from northern Indiana. He currently lives in Bedford, Indiana, with his wife, Tara, and three children, Kaiya, Isaac, and Zadia. (And for some reason he found writing the preceding two sentences nearly impossible.)