Rattlewire

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Abstract

“They put bad boys in cages,” they used to tell the little boy (who stirred ant villages with a stick) on sweltering Saturday morning outings to Dierker’s Dry Goods...
“They put bad boys in cages.”
they used to tell
the little boy
(who stirred ant villages with a stick)
on sweltering Saturday morning outings to
Dierker’s Dry Goods.

Dusty green striped awnings
dry, tinted, shades on the display windows
translucent and mottled like cicada shells

Inside, brittle women sold gingham, or flower-patterned cotton
to lumbering old ladies, who had countless house-dresses
that all looked alike.

The little boy scratched his blond bristles, smelling
the dusty cloth and musty cardboard, and strained over
bolts and hat boxes looking for the place where they
put the bad boys.

(Somewhere on a high shelf a rickety fan rattled in
half-revolution, its black cloth cord kinked and frayed
like a battered, sullen, snake — there was a wire guard around
the blades)

A clerk put a dry thick-veined hand on his shoulder
— his heart surged, leaped from the thought of rattling
in a wire box.