

THE BOONIE HAT

**LINWOOD
RUMNEY**

Creased on both sides, the full brim proves
even then my father, an army ranger
in Vietnam, squared the boundaries
of his vision through the hats he wore.

Standard issue in '69, made
of rip-stop cloth-leaf camo pattern-
it has black metal eyelets and mesh
ventilation screens, two on each side.

The label reads, *Hat, Camouflage,
for Tropical Combat, Type II.*
It's most decayed along the chinstrap
where his sweat and decades of attic

storage frayed the nylon-cotton cord.
This is the hat he loaned me for my travels
in Costa Rica, because, he says,
The sun hits harder than you think.

Cooled by his vintage shade, I was
neither invading force nor listless tourist,
though I feared I might be both.
I wore it as I learned the layout

of San José, shielding my eyes
with auburn-tinted metal-rimmed
Aviator glasses. Absurdly dressed
in the military trappings of my father's

generation and thinking I'd camouflaged
my blue eyes, pale complexion
and straw-colored hair, I manufactured
my first *¡Buenos días!* and *¿Dónde estoy?*

I wore it again as I hiked three days
through the Cloud Forest to spend a week
at a tourist's lodge owned by an expat's son.
Seen by hawks from above, I wanted

to seem a forest pixel moving too slowly
to be of interest, and seen from the side
by howler monkeys screaming
between tree limbs, I wanted to be

the figure of a man distilled from leaf
to leaf. By day I paid my keep digging
a fish pond, and at dusk, we split
a bottle of whiskey as he recounted

stories of gelding stallions. His tongue
muffled by booze and trapped
between his father's homeland
and the only country he knew, he detailed

the knots used to keep the horse
from kicking, as the sun softened
behind clouds. Folded on my knee
my father's boonie hat hid nothing,

as my friend explained where to find
the seam, how to sever cords anchoring
organ to muscle, as the sun set,
splayed out and wincing beneath us.