

## Casual Violence in Sunday School

*Gregory Brooks*

John the Baptist was a hairy scorpion  
who skittered out from the wilderness  
and began stinging folks  
until they saw the Holy Ghost.

He molted like all prophets do,  
lived in caves, under rocks,  
until the predators found him—  
took his mandibles, his head.

A dove landed in the blood,  
tracked little vees across the stones.  
We the ones who hear the story,  
some of us too terrified to speak,

we wonder when the martyrdom  
will slice our way.  
And why our fathers sharpen  
knives below the pew.

Emphasis on death, on liquid pride  
dripping down a hanging tree.  
Carry a sword, perhaps of words.  
Defend, find prestige in priesthood might.

We were children when we heard  
decapitation was the only course  
to save the world. Just kids when  
Haun's Mill came out on VHS.

I stayed up every night after my baptism,  
wringing my hands, worried God  
would command me to kill—  
and if he did, how I would shrink.