

*Robert Stewart*

## Fighting Chuck Berry

If you want legend, take Maybellene,  
the ghost of all our fears: whatever  
it meant to be true, she couldn't be.  
Take the father of rock 'n' roll,  
we considered a neighbor, off  
the highway Tina Turner drove  
to cross into East St. Louis,  
before the arch clicked shut  
like a club's side door and IDs  
glowed with our faces in the gaze  
of a stranger's flashlight.

Better go

Sunday afternoon with my buddy Bob  
and dates to drop in at Berry's ranch,  
Wentzville, Missouri, the near-perfect  
circle-pink house with center pool  
and original, pink V8 Ford  
Mustang in the drive, a beauty,  
Berry's dad rooting in the garage to find us  
a barbecue pit we'd carry down,  
reelin' and rockin' with the heavy table,  
to the lake we named Berryland,  
the promised land we knew in St. Louis—  
pork steaks and Maul's, Budweiser,  
the German potato salad my mother  
made; the old gentleman slapped  
my shoulders to welcome us white  
kids not married yet, even once.

The factual and the actual, the did,  
the I swear, and this really happened,  
and no shit, that day, Bob and I  
believed was ours, all ours, even  
the red canoe we took out, letting  
the girls breathe air for a moment  
clear of our demands, calm as shade.

I did see

Chuck Berry in the distance then,  
running full speed, not like that thing  
he did across stage, full-damn-speed  
down the hill right at us, yelling,  
*You stole my canoe, stole my canoe.*  
Bob and me meeting him at the shore,  
where Berry chest-bumped me  
for money, and the girls, yes,  
the girls knew something like this.  
I put up my fists, told him back off,  
Berry; and he, young, then, not  
taking shit—this in St. Louis,  
where we all grew up knowing  
what mixed and didn't, and knew  
we'd fought each other every day  
of our lives, on Laclede Station Road  
and Kingshighway.

Chuck Berry

with his fists up, legs bent, came  
at me, the father of rock 'n' roll,

