

# The New Criterion

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## The kite

by James Ulmer

She was seven when they lived in Kentucky,  
her father between jobs, driving a cab.

One morning he brought home  
a kite, forest green with a scarlet demon,

and she flew it all July,  
running and letting out string until it rose  
and her demon caught the wind in his arms.  
Summer ended as it always does, an eternity

of faultless blue air.

Late afternoon in October, an hour  
of daylight left, the string caught on a branch  
and snapped. She watched her kite

whip in the breeze, tear loose and slide away  
over backyard gardens of pumpkins and squash,  
a black speck that rose over the hills,  
each tree like a struck match.

She told me this late at night.

In a few minutes she was quiet, her breath  
measured in the darkness. I knew  
how the story ended, how years later

the cancer gnawed her father to the bone  
until he was almost nothing, thin air drifting  
from room to dark room, and seemed to lift  
out of this burning world and vanish.

—James Ulmer

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