

Stephen S. Mills

## Mistaken Identity & Other Poems

### ↳MISTAKEN IDENTITY↳<sup>1</sup>

When I type your name into Google  
my screen fills with links to a Dustin  
Carter I don't know: a young man  
who's a state champion high school  
wrestler from Ohio, who had all four  
of his limbs amputated when he was 5.  
When I click "images," as anyone  
would, there he is in full color: a body  
trimmed away, yet still he dominates  
the mat. His half-arms, half-legs stretching  
in every direction, pinning down  
the other boys with his 103 pounds  
of power and spandex, not unlike you  
pinning me to the bed—naked.  
I wonder if some day you'll be mistaken  
for this boy. Perhaps at an airport.  
Say the ticket agent sees your name  
and he's from Ohio, played basketball,  
but was always overshadowed by a limbless  
wrestler who got a story in *Sports Illustrated*.

This agent seeks revenge and just  
as he's about to give you a seat between  
two annoying passengers with screaming  
children he'll look up, see your limbs intact,  
realize his mistake, but disappointment  
will make him give you the seat anyway,  
because for a second you and Wrestler  
Carter will have been the same person.

Like someday I might be mistaken  
for the Judo blogger who shares my name  
and enjoys expressing his love of martial  
arts to strangers. I read his posts,  
though I don't even know what Judo is  
exactly, but I imagine it can be quite thrilling  
for those who appreciate the way bodies  
move in space: the visual representation  
of violence. Blogger Mills ends each post  
with the words: "keep smiling" and I wonder  
what he has to smile about. Judo? His ability  
to look good in white? Or maybe the new  
sexual positions he's created based on  
this ancient art of moving? He addresses  
his readers as if there are hundreds,  
maybe thousands, yet no one has left  
a comment, making me think his audience  
is actually quite small, might only be made up  
of other Stephen Millses who found his blog  
by narcissistically searching Google  
for their own reflection—which I find  
when I switch my search to "images" (safe  
filter off). It's a picture with both a Dustin  
Carter and a Stephen Mills, and it's really us.  
We're standing in suits about to kiss, flowers

in our lapels. It's from the mock weddings we did in college to help show the Midwest that gay people aren't so scary, but the local newspaper refused to publish a photo of two young men about to kiss at a fake wedding, so the photographer posted it on his webpage instead. There we are in cyberspace: two boys in love. And I wonder if that wrestler or blogger has ever typed his name into Google, hit "images," and stared in amazement at us, thinking: *maybe one day I'll be mistaken for a boy who kissed another boy on a cold February day in Indiana.*

#### 👉OBAMA SAYS SAME-SEX COUPLES SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO MARRY👈

*"I think about members of my own staff who are in incredibly committed monogamous relationships, same-sex relationships, who are raising kids together,"*  
—President Obama

The man next to me isn't you.  
He's taller. Hair shorter. Skin darker. You're on his other side.  
The sheets on the floor. The dog scratching the door. Everyone naked. Everyone still. The sudden peace that comes from release.  
We don't know his name.  
It doesn't matter. He is a body.  
You are a body. I am a body.  
Nothing more. Soon, he'll rise and dress. Legs into pants. Shirt over head. I'll slide underwear

up thighs. You'll find an old pair  
of gym shorts. We'll walk him  
to the door. He'll kiss our mouths.  
Thank us. It's unlikely we'll see  
him again. Tonight, you'll buy  
groceries. I'll cook dinner. We'll  
sit at my dead grandma's table  
and talk of the future. Of a move  
North. We'll watch episodes  
of *Seinfeld* on DVD and eat cereal  
as a late night snack. You'll walk  
the dog. I'll load the dishwasher.  
Brush my teeth. Slide into sheets  
and wait for the heat of your body.  
The soft fur of your chest. Your  
hands on skin. In bed, you'll slowly  
and deliberately make me cum.  
I'll kiss your mouth. You'll stroke  
the hair on my ass. We'll roll  
into each other and sleep will  
come. First for you. Always  
quick. Then for me. Our bodies  
falling into familiar rhythms.

↳ SEEING A DEAD LIZARD AFTER READING MARK DOTY'S *TURTLE, SWAN*↳<sup>2</sup>

His body is crushed above his front  
legs. His head cocked forward and up.  
One eye bugging out of socket. From  
a few feet away he still looks alive  
as if he might scurry into the bushes

at any moment. But he doesn't move.  
The other lizards take no notice,  
still swim across the grass, their legs  
paddling against the uneven blades  
as I enter the courtyard, my dog in tow.

Even he won't go near the lizard.  
Doesn't want to sniff it, has no  
intention of putting it in his mouth,  
for he is particular (or is it distrusting?)  
of what he closes his mouth around.

If only I was as cautious. By the next  
morning the lizard is gone. Picked up  
by the yardmen? Maybe. Carried off  
and buried by the kids who live below  
us? A lesson in death? Probably not.

Those kids are more likely to set fire  
to the building than to care for  
the body of a dead lizard. Maybe  
he's still there in the cement, melted  
down by the hot Florida sun, not even

leaving a stain—no remains. At night  
in our bed, the story of the lizard  
two flights down, I make you promise

I won't die alone, like the gay couple  
we read about who didn't get to say

goodbye, didn't have the right paperwork,  
weren't a family. The one in the back  
of the ambulance dying of a heart attack,  
the other forced to follow in his car  
whispering: *don't let him die, don't let him die.*

But he did. We don't have paperwork,  
the right kind or the wrong kind. No  
legal document ties my body to yours.  
Some days I allow myself to think  
of losing you, of you suddenly gone.

As a young boy, I read those books  
of strange disappearances, like the farmer  
who walked into his cornfield  
and never came out. *Vanished*, they say,  
which is fitting for two boys

who escaped the corn-soaked land  
of Indiana, where we once ventured  
into an old movie theater to watch  
Vincent Price in *House of Wax* (the 3-D  
version). The red velvet of the seats

worn thin, springs creaking with each  
movement, each readjustment. There  
in the dark, straight Midwestern  
couples all around, you took my hand,  
whispered how beautiful I was, leaned

your head into mine. Our cardboard glasses touched, bent, my eyes blurred, then re-focused and suddenly everything came to life: bounced off the screen, off our faces, out of our seats.

## ♣THE MAN ON GRINDR DOESN'T LIKE MY OPEN RELATIONSHIP♣

*Single guys only*, his profile proclaims right above his shirtless torso, his sunglassed eyes, his mouth a perfect smirk. But he's messaged me. Sent me his cock and ass shots without my request. He tells me he loves gingers. *Obsessed with them.* And suddenly I see myself chained in his basement surviving on scraps of bread and pissing in a bucket. This is all before he notices my open relationship status. Without warning, everything changes. His love of red hair between thighs, above cocks, and under arms isn't enough. *YOU GOT A BF?* He types in all caps. I tell him *yes.* He's angry, but for all the wrong reasons. Not angry that he didn't read my rather brief profile or that now I've seen his body in every position possible. But angry at me for having a man, yet wanting more. For wanting to experience the rush of new bodies upon first meeting. The risk of chains in the basement or maybe just bad kissing. Risks all the same. He's just 21. His life's been

marked by fights for marriage equality  
and the hope that he might live a life  
just like his parents, his siblings,  
his high school buddies. He doesn't  
want a queer like me. Lucky for him,  
one tap and I vanish from sight.  
Ginger and all.

## Author Bio

Stephen S. Mills holds an MFA from Florida State University. His work has appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, *PANK Literary Magazine*, *The New York Quarterly*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Knockout*, *Assaracus*, and others. He is also the winner of the 2008 Gival Press Oscar Wilde Poetry Award. His first book, *He Do the Gay Man in Different Voices*, is out from Sibling Rivalry Press and was a finalist for the Thom Gunn Poetry Award and won the Lambda Literary Award for Gay Poetry. He currently lives in New York City. Website: <http://www.stephensmills.com/>

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