



ME & MISSISSIPPI

—JOE WILKINS

A middle-aged white woman who had not yet been served rose from her seat and came over to us. “I’d like to stay here with you,” she said, “but my husband is waiting.”

—Anne Moody, from *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

On Farish then & ever after the sun is on my shoulders,
like an early morning rain at first
but mouth hot now,
wet flame all the worse because it’s wet, because you
ought not
to be so hot swimming through the way
you have to do. Oh, I know I should
know you upside & down, Mississippi,
but I guess all these years again there’s nothing
so blue
as the true blue of a policeman’s blouse,
silent, knife-headed dog lunging, once,
on its leash, & the crowd
giving me not a few stink-eyed looks, & him
acting like everything is A-OK fine,
pulling me along, hustling me down Farish &
onto Pearl
& talking supper chops & Donnie Ray & that
business
with the new fish pond up near Itta Bena—

he’s right pulling me off my feet, & I tell him
stop, I’m going to fall, & he says



don't you right here in the street for anyone &
everyone dare—

don't you goddamn dare.

Later, on the TV set,

a high school boy, a good, lean looking boy,
slaps her face, smears the ketchup in her hair.

I touched her shoulder, I say,

not to him or anyone but me & Mississippi,

me & the burning, dirty river in me,

me & what I might have been.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joe Wilkins is the author of a memoir, *The Mountain and the Fathers* (Counterpoint 2012), winner of the 2014 GLCA New Writers Award, and a finalist for the 2013 Orion Book Award. He has also written two collections of poems, *Notes from the Journey Westward* (White Pine 2012) and *Killing the Murnion Dogs* (Black Lawrence 2011). His work has appeared in the *Georgia Review*, the *Southern Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Ecotone*, the *Sun*, *Orion*, and *Slate*. A Pushcart Prize winner and National Magazine Award finalist, he lives with his family in western Oregon, where he teaches writing at Linfield College.