



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MARGARET TILTNER PROJECTS, NEW YORK CITY

Homer Watson Blvd (red house), a painting by Monica Tap, whose work is on view this month at Wynick/Tuck Gallery, in Toronto.

[Memoir]

THE SPECIAL CHILD

By Mark Richard, published in the Autumn issue of the *Southern Review* and included in *House of Prayer No. 2*, out this month from Nan A. Talese.

Say you are the special child. Say one reason you are special is there is something wrong with your legs. You cannot run. Your legs will not move fast enough. When you try to run, your hips click and pop. When you have to run a race, like at the going-away party at a doctor's house in the old town, when everyone is running toward the doctor's house that will burn completely to the ground the next year, you pretend to trip and fall and not finish the race. You avoid foot races; you avoid running at all. When something bad happens and everyone else runs away, rocks thrown through greenhouse glass, loose spikes thrown at passing caboose windows, fishing boats untethered along a riverbank, you

know you will have to face whoever is coming in their anger. You learn you must never get caught.

In the new town the teachers don't say you are special like the teachers did in the old town. They use the word slow. And you are slow. But they also say you are slow when you are sitting at your desk unable to color the state bird. You can't get the red crayon to work on the cardinal in a way that makes the teacher happy. Your father has said to be careful about signing your name to anything, so you don't put your name on your homework. A suspicious teacher has said that if your parents are really from Louisiana, you must be able to speak French. *Oui*, you say. You try to speak with a French accent, you still try to spend your Confederate money, you still wear your father's Army helmet to school. No one can understand what you are saying, and big boys from out in the county want to fight you in line to the cafeteria. They come up behind you and flip off your helmet and you have to fight them almost every day. The fighting finally stops when you break a boy's hand. When your mother finds out, she cries because she is afraid