

## American Encomienda

### New Suits

When you first get a new suit, it is clean, crisp, composed. A new suit lends strength, a boldness in knowing that you have shaken off the chains of yesterday. Yet, you are bound by the stiff cloth, the itchy scruff, reminding you that it's not you; it's an illusion borne of the whims of society's propriety. You pray, hoping no one realizes the sweat tainting the pure white cloth. You pray, hoping you won't have to clean your suit, but you must. After all, it represents you, your new life, the new you.

Rising from the ashes of your toils, your money ignites a blaze that casts your shadows deep into the future, fleeing your past. Yet, your past sneaks in your crooked teeth, your socks, your watch, or even the slight intone when you say, "Tomato" or that subtle gleam when you say, "Payday." After all, you're new. Despite all your scheming, your new suit is you.

When you are first indoctrinated into the machine, you need a new suit, grey and monotone and drab. You have to be converted and vacuumed and drained. You have to be a button pusher and a serf and a robot. Your salary becomes the law, and the contract, (or the bloody book if you're an extremist) your bible. You wake up in your new suit, wondering where all your time went, where all your dreams fled, where your spark died. You search, tearing through your clutter, your possessions. You iron your new suit and treat it like grey gold. After all, the new suit is you.

When you first wear your new suit, the silky feeling chills your arms, as you don your armor. You must plunge into a brave world, a terrifying world, a world of unknowns. Like a toddling prophet, you hide behind your suit, never mind that the hat covers your eyes. It's all in order to see! See the world, so different from your grey suit. Yet, the bowl hat slips down your brow, protecting you, warding off the world. You've seen enough, you can remember the dream. The colors, the vibrancy, jump at you, mesmerize you, drown you. You don't need to glance again-no, you fear glancing again. What if it's different? What if you're wrong? You blame it on the new suit. After all, you aren't a suit.

## The American Dream

I am a superman: kryptonite life. I have you know when I return two feet below—that good dark earth, I shall rise again. With my brethren born anew to escape from the machine with its ever marching dead. I shall heal this despicable treason called life. Nevertheless, for all regards, I am human: emotional, fantastic, horrible, human. Perhaps, it'd take a second glance or three, and you might notice something strange, some false tilt of the chin, which bespeaks of some false confidence that could only stem from hidden heroics. I was born the good Samaritan, but went down and under to find that Epicurean life.

We are all red queens, poisoning our Adams into reaching for that forbidden fruit. We compete, evolve, twist our minds until it fits in the pinhole and in doing so, become the same needle, endlessly shrinking the great vastness in which we romped as giants among children. We call it motivation.

Perhaps that's all we really want, the very cynicism of America: the Pilgrim belief that heaven can only be found when you buy out all the faith. A straight royal flush in a democratic dystopia. Look to our leaders, our masters, the holders of the whip: our president, our fuhrer, our vozhd. Guiding the promiscuous proletariat from the glorious solitude to the vainglorious light of nations for all to see, judge, despise.

They versus us, we, you, me. They will come, the gloomy walking dead bemoaning of the sheep. They are the fatalistic martyrs of Marx, the unwitting slaves of Nozick. They toil, and in doing so, discover themselves one foot closer to the grave. The racist vagabond, the angry worker, the college dropout: they all wonder where did the dream go- that dream which their great grandfather, twenty generations back, impressed upon his black imports.

Yet. . . for all that, they will rage against the new blood, calling it the dying of the light, complacent knowing that there is always someone worse. Inside, they tremble, as their grey world, of which they had control, understanding, identity seems to burst with color, a terrible, fearful world. The very thing they need is what they fear. Heads buried in their graves, a fluffed ostrich to be laughed at by the world. Sometimes, I ask. And what of it?

## The Yellow Collared Pill Man

I met the pill man yesterday.  
He offered me a white one,  
saying it would make my worries fly away.

I frowned. He shrugged,  
his head thrown back, eyes closed.

I heard his smile  
in the throb as he swallowed.

He remarked, "It's a new one."

"For?" I asked.

"Forgetting about life."

"Is there one for death?"

"Of course. There are some to cure it and others to forget."

He flourished a black one, a complacent smirk plastered on his face.

"This one a day will keep the cancer away."

"Terrifying stuff." I remarked.

Was it the healing or the death?

He nodded his head, looking into some unseen future.

"A terrible betrayal. To grow so much,  
you suffocate. What a dreadful way to go."

He pulled out a golden pill.

It blended with his palm,  
merging in and out of unreality.

"This one'll make you rich."

Interested, I leaned forward, sniffing it.

It smelled metallic, bitter, corrupt. I coughed.

"I'll pass."

He shoved it into my hand.

"You touched it. You have to buy it." He shrieked.

I hadn't, but I wasn't looking for a thrill.

While handing out a shiny green,

I examined him,

a faded con-man

clutching the tatters of his ephemeral glory.

His hands ripped the bill from me,

as if he were a dead man grasping life.

This poor man, peddling his pots of pills.

He was the traveling salesman, dreaming the American dream.

He died of liver poisoning.

## Biting Dust

Born as dogs,  
twenty-four years apart.  
His dog likes to listen to Beatles music.  
It dances, paws grasping heaven.  
Now, it sleeps, eats, and dances- But only  
to the Beatles.

His dog likes steak, he would  
sneak some to it, whenever he ate.  
His dog is well-fed, happy but not.  
Without him, it knows the world has lost  
Someone.  
His dog would sit, bark, jump, lie, dance, roll  
when he ate his morning bagel.  
He would ignore it. Begging fostered bad habits  
he claimed. But he would  
always drop the last bite and forget  
to clean up.

His dog used to like car rides, tongue waving in the wind,  
jaw hanging as if in a loose grin.  
It would jump in, unless it knew,  
With its foresight, that he would  
take it to the vet.

We used to drive to parks  
and play tag and frisbee and fetch and keep away.  
It never leaves our home, now.  
Except, for its slow walk. Where it's always pulling  
or looking back. As if, looking for him.  
When he would jerk back and scold.

It likes beds with striped covers.  
It only drinks from yellow dishes.  
It only wears its collar that he made,  
His telephone number, printed in iron.  
"If found please return"  
As if, it's all that it has left.

Across Endless Blue

When I was born, my grandmother  
promised to quit smoking  
her black cigars. Mother Feared  
the hazy fumes strangled  
her sleeping child.

I've heard it's hard to leave  
a habit borne in clouds  
of nicotine, but I  
would never attempt. Stares  
would crush my soul burden'd  
by my mother's tears  
stinging like blood.  
As if crimson waves could  
efface my sinful shame.

In her twilight, Grandma  
would swallow sterile pills  
with tea. Her relieved smile  
murmured in the throb of her  
swallow. As if the pills  
could cure the blackness  
eating inside. But  
I watched, those white ovals  
sucking her vibrant hues.

Was she grasping life,  
that hardy, frail,  
stubborn, loving woman?  
Or did she fear death?  
I can't imagine  
her lying in bed,  
and as she felt that weakness,  
did she swallow pills,  
as my mother begged?

My grandmother believed  
in work, scoffing

at vainglorious whimsies  
as if the only sin was honor sold.  
She found pride in her  
tan, brown hands, the wrinkles  
evidence of suffering untold  
and as my grandmother,  
who fled and sought  
the Great Dream  
across the Pacific,  
found her will fade  
as her story ended; did she  
think back to her family across  
the sea?  
She died of liver poisoning.