

Camouflage

Under the shade  
of a barren  
apple orchard,  
little children play  
at poverty.

With no shoes,  
they smear dirt  
on their noses  
and clothes.  
All innocence  
in hillbilly blackface.

They make mock  
depression dolls  
with their lunch  
left-overs, chuck rocks  
at beehives, pummel  
a copperhead corpse  
with fiberglass fence-posts  
and fish for leaves  
in mud puddles  
with bits of string.

They were sensible  
enough to bring  
these things from the  
air-conditioned city.

By the time  
they return  
to the farmhouse,  
they're covered  
in burs, like coonhound  
curs, new clothes  
all tattered and torn.

Their aged grandma  
catches them,  
and tans their backs  
with a switch.  
The children, tear-choked,  
scream incoherently

at the injustice of it all.

Privilege

It was a generation that crept  
along on knee-pads.  
These, the picayune people,  
preyed upon  
the Almighty Dollar,  
panhandling in cashmere suits  
and charmeuse silk dresses.

Recessive

My mother's in the living room,  
staining the walls, spraying  
them with the sickly sweet yellow  
smell of cigarillo smoke,  
using calloused hands as an ashtray

and my father's out of work.  
I can hear him in the bedroom  
suppressing sobs,  
like smothering puppies,  
into a bed-wallowed pillow.

They barely speak between  
their gasping, both fighting for air  
in their confined closeness.

Underseam

Between the incessant barking of the mixed-  
pomeranian pup and the cutting clink  
of knives on plates, nothing was audible—  
a silence intolerable.

Of course, not racist, they kept their traps  
shut. But still, she was a stain on the white tablecloth,  
which one hides on the underside  
or else attacks vigorously with bleach.

Fireflies

It's dusk, and fireflies dot  
the horizon in every direction,  
communicating with their own kind  
of Morse code. Little dashes and dots  
light up the trees, signals intermingling  
with the indecipherable effects  
of this midsummer evening.

As I fiddle with my notebook, trying  
to capture the intricacies  
of their language, I realize theirs  
is a frequency which has been denied me,  
the antenna of my linguistic ear  
broken to the complex cries  
of their community.

In an act of sheer defiance,  
for such a brazen show could mean nothing else,  
and as if to further my frustration  
and flaunt its semantic prowess,  
one of theirs lands on my hand  
and began to brandish  
a rather aureate display  
in order to irritate me.

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I smashed it and felt satisfied  
in my own form of intellectual supremacy.