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Tanganyika

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Robert Hackett

Tanganyika

The boats, with their ribbed nets winging off the rails, struggle like insects on the water. The boys command flea-red dogs to swim in the pink water. They whack each other in the head with sticks while their fathers gut fish on the shore. You gaze across the lake to the silhouette of another country. I smell smoke. Soon the boys assemble before us. One of the smaller boys approaches with one hand behind his back, as if to offer something. I make to accept what appears to be a playing card. He turns it slowly, revealing the ace of spades, and as I grasp it he vows, "Ce n'est plus à moi." A chrome fish jumps in the lake.

In my palm, the ace points west, to a plume of smoke whistling across the water where the monkeys experiment with fire. I hold the card to my lips and kiss that black heart for what must be seconds before I tuck it between my belt and belly. The boys begin twisting all that they have seen in their minds as you start to dance in the lavender light.