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Chores

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CHORES

The van is black & its only door opens lazily. I am leaving
this block of single-story homes, the mounds of compost
set out each night for the dead & the one secret every
carport keeps.

I am leaving 1973, its turnstiles of ice & the summer
unrolling its gauze
as the worm eats its slow way out of my knapsack's
single black peach.

I am leaving the suburb's sad bars, where the strippers begin
their bodies' cold circles
for blind men, who, contented, smile & nod their heads.
Each of them is facing a direction that is different
& wrong, & tonight, as they stumble down the sidewalk
on their way to disappearing forever, their eyes fill with a mist
that is useless and everywhere.

Despite all this, I wave as I go by them, anxious
to be anywhere that is not the past, or Richmond.
I am leaving the smile stitched unremarkably into my face
& my neck's stillborn freckle. I am leaving the grass,
the green, malarial grass, drowsing in its dewy web
& I am leaving the small, blond hearses snails are.

I am leaving this vernacular of silence, with its drawl
that is slow & persistent, like the hair of the dead.
I am leaving the drowned children to the river,
to the nights
they spend swatting minnows from their eyes & I am leaving
the slow parade of washed-away livestock.

Nothing else will change. Lovers will go on
muttering their names into each others' mouths,
the clouds will still gather & hatch their simple plots
& everywhere
car thieves will remain briefly free. Like a Bible on the
counter of a burning house,
I pass quickly & without notice. The streets are empty
& can only grow more empty. Whatever the burning
circuitry of sewers
carries out beneath me will remain important
& unknown, as I leave this city, as I set loose the one
syllable trapped inside my tongue,
as I give away everything until all I have is my one life
& it is not this one.

Tonight the matches sleep in their small cabins,
keys lose themselves into their own pockets, the future
carries out
its lonely tense & I return to the chores that keep me free:
lacquering the darkness, hanging the stars out to dry.