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## The Thin Disease

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## THE THIN DISEASE

Nearly seven feet tall, a skeleton  
made of giant bird bones,  
a bird-cage rib-cage,  
his heart a little pulsing  
robin, Winston from Ghana  
on the old Gold Coast  
was my best friend.  
He'd reach down  
to tap me on my red head. "Dutch,  
we're going to cadge some drinks.  
Tell them I'm King Quazi  
of oilrich offshore Quaziland.  
Tell them my kingdom is ten miles long  
and a quarter mile wide, including beaches."

Ghanian Winston had purple-grey skin  
and was so thin he looked like the shadow of a pole,  
but his head was large and noble,  
with cheekbones carved in slate,  
and royally crested with a pompadour  
befitting the son of a son of a king  
from the ancient West African Empire,  
though he was always church-mouse poor.  
We worked on the New York docks,  
off-loading ships, on-loading trucks.  
He wasn't very strong. He drank a lot  
and bled from the rectum when he worked.  
They had to cut the grapes away.  
Like a daddy longlegs and a flat red beetle,  
we wobbled to a bar near the hospital,  
a knot of stitches still in his new tight ass.  
He could ignore the pain for the booze.

He put his arm over my shoulder.  
“Dutch, I’m going to die.  
I’ve got the thin disease.  
I’ll never go back to Ghana  
to see the revolution through.”  
I didn’t want him to die.  
“Sure you will. You’ll go back.”  
There were good times yet.  
But he died. He died.  
He died. The white bed  
was empty but for a wave-crested,  
welted head, and limp hoses,  
some of which were black  
and leaked their fluids.  
Ghana was far away, a dream,  
but I was there, near, here,  
his friend, holding his hand,  
our funny different fingers  
entwined, though pulling apart.