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Reminiscences of Recession

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Sitting on the county steps next to
Archangel Michael
throwing bones with a pinch of chew:
tiny shards of minty cancer
soak in our bottom lips,
tingling like pinched nerves

Our scoliosis of mind
has us hunching to misery
as nicotine rushes to brain
scrambling with the madness of hunger.

We are unemployed.
Looking for work under rocks,
basking in the volatile certainty of youth,
wel-fare won’t feed us, ain’t got kids—

Two police cars round the corner
waving at us with their lights,
St. Michael fondles the butt of his gun,
as the officers asks us what’s in the cart,

Just aluminum shells of peoples
cold summer drinks, a jar of Lincolns
we’ve emancipated from the ground,
and a couple of warm malts the color of copper, sir,

We are advised
to assume the usual position:
hands up in name of the lord,
legs spread to pyramid.

They show us the barrels of their guns,
cold black metal offerings of peace.

Their hands travel down and up,
toes to head,
interrogating the folds of our clothes.

Worry is creased into our pants.
Our shirts and faces lousy wrinkled.
My stomach hoists an acidic flag
of nervous tension with the delicacy of butterflies.

St. Michael has a gun,
but no one sees him,
but me.
A sudden warning lingers
after repeating itself in my hearts tempo
upbeat.

Weary knees tremble, reminiscent of
Parkinson’s,
I loosen my bones again and click clack
down the street.

The officers watch
as we transplant our loitering
rhythmically under the nearest leafy arms
of shade.

II
My archangel wanders
to the wooden crucible of port’s end.
He places himself on the ledge of the water,
a crumpled hamburger wrapper drifting
endlessly in the sleepy muddy tide.

His head dangles between his knees a
pendulum of sobs.
Homely wings shed autumn feathers
tinged in Steel Reserve
that veer into the lavender halo of sunset.

III
The Stockton night begins to fall
throwing up its gang signs in graffiti stars
and barrio low riding clouds,
the dusk claims blue
while the dawn throws up its red rag.

An irradiant dark permeates
over the manmade coves and trash lined sidewalks;
still vagrancy haunts foreclosed lots celebrating
their wholesome vacancy behind chain link fences.

IV
At midnight even buildings are
indifferent to tagged sidewalks,
towers of condemned bricks
crouch over scattered bulks of human newspaper
snoring the eloquence of the American
dream on the dirt.

Under the free-ways the homeless employed
carpet the grounds like miniature
cathedrals of despair.
Silhouettes of poignant tents rest amidst a
cacophony of crickets.

V
Cop sirens wail
through the startled pops
of anonymous gunshots,
their echoes sing a somber song
that lingers in the moons residue,
slowly, quietly returning the
frightening still of the dark,

Nothing dares interrupt the eerie
silence that cedes the inverted sunrise of death,
the river Styx rings in our ears
as we walk by boys calling for their moms,
choking on the blood of their own prayers;
the holes in their chest gush like ruptured
water mains

Archangel nods, and closes their
eyes long before the ambulance of hope
arrives;

The paramedics say this:
Many have claimed this slab
for themselves,
some have donated blood,
and some have left themselves
outlined in chalk on the blacktop
but in harsher
Words, ones that mustn’t be spoken,

VI
St. Michael spits out his chew,
and gives me his gun.
He puts his delicate gnarled hands
on my shoulders and leaves,
apologizing for reminding me
to help myself.

I get up to get help,
stumbling to the payphone as
I snort another line of powdered downtown
and call
nine hundred eleven.

From somewhere
the baritone panic of car trunks echoes
and vibrates
down and around
the violent empty streets
making every window pop n lock.

I walk back to the county steps alone;
all that’s left is a loaded gun, and an empty
forty bottle with a prayer inside

G.O. Horvilleur