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Pathology

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Pathology

Some men are born to cry uncle
with the hands of fathers, mouths of mothers.
Mine has worn the same thing for years:
a wet apron strung with mirrors

tied around his waist with sweet potato vine
which he tied to my waist as well.
He fingers the vine daily, a rosary he made
himself, a green badge of loneliness.

I learned early on that it takes a tornado, to get him
to stand still long enough, to hear me.
I must uproot the trees, each and every time,
that have grown back in his ears.

It takes the likes of Job to wait for tornadoes.
It takes hard work to uproot trees. More than once,
I've planted whispers in the holes they left, hoping.
They didn't grow away; they blossomed shade.

I chose my words like a borrowed child
would, until they were hoarse and dry
so they might blend into the sound of cattle
grazing, catfish frying, into something familiar.

He would not let me be quiet and alone. Like him,
I lived in the kitchen. Among skillets
as wide as hours. Among jars of bacon grease
slowly milking themselves into separate halves.

But it is his kitchen. It is his house. And he's
hung mountains on the walls. And the little sun
that snakes through each morning is quickly wound
with sweet potato vine into another knot.

The sun sliver then sets behind the steeple
across the road of the church he built with
the preacher who on more than one occasion
has come by for scraps, his hands for plates.

Yet, this plain and simple house is also mine
because he fed me the pain of the land, the brick,
the haul of the crop, the leftovers, so often
that the spoon rarely left my mouth.

So, I choked. So, I left him. I left him
while he slept in the valley of his kingdom.
I walked away, a timid young man not
realizing his legs could run.

I got as far as the gate when it happened.
He woke immediately. The draft from the open
screen door caught its tail in the mesh; it cried out.
His gardened face dug up from a deep sleep.

He leaned against one of his mountains, staring,
while he grabbed the vine and gave it a pull.
I went back up the knotted, gravel drive,
my face clearly visible in his apron.

-T.K. Lee
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