Children

by Amanda Nazario

I had a dream that I owned millions of cartons of cigarettes—not to smoke them (I don't smoke), but to use them as currency. This was a dream in which I didn't know fear. Everyone who smoked came up to me asking for one cigarette or half a cigarette; in exchange they gave me vegetables, bottles of water, socks, soap. I was rich. In this dream I lived in the bar and was married to Craig—not officially, but nothing was official anymore; marriage was just mating. Craig doled beer out into shot glasses, accepting items of different weights for different quantities of beer—a radish for a small beer, a potato for a big one. Every evening I'd return to the bar after my day of trading cigarettes for goods, load the goods into the bar's cellar, eat, then come upstairs to help Craig run the bar and trade more cigarettes for more things. Craig himself got his cigarettes for free—he was the only one. He would close the bar in the early morning and we'd sit together reading, holding hands, while Craig smoked. He knew to wash his hands after he was done, and clean his teeth, so that I would let him into our bed at the back of the bar and we could fall asleep with our faces too close even to kiss, the sounds of the city's chaos muffled by our bodies and the bricks in the walls.

Eventually the cars stopped running; everyone scavenged their chassis and used the seats, the stereos. The destitute built lives inside the empty hulls of the cars, or they used the seats and stereos to furnish forts they built on the sidewalk. Police stopped coming—there weren't any left. Soon, all the pavement broke apart and plants grew up between the cracks, their roots heaving soil up to the surface. People cleared away the rocks that used to be pavement, picked more stones out of the dirt and planted seeds there. These farmers came to the bar with their arms full of food, and Craig and I ate some of it and used the rest to make more liquor and beer. We saw far into the future to a time when the bar would not be necessary, when everyone made his or her own spirits out of

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fruits and potatoes instead of trading it for ours; when they would also make their own cigarettes, if they wanted cigarettes anymore. But at the end of the dream I looked in the cellar again, and with joy and satisfaction saw the cartons and kegs and bottles stacked up neatly to the ceiling in great abundance—enough for us, enough for the city. We would never live long enough to see our supply run out, and we had no children.