

# Bendable

by Brian Michael Barbeito

“You're bendable,” he said, and then there was this silence as we looked into the space in front of us. I understood what he meant right off and thought it a gift to speak to someone that did not get the words exactly right, but in not doing so, got them more right than right could be. I inquired further what he was getting at though.

“Bendable? What do you mean?”

“Well if something happens a way that it is not supposed to, you don't get all mad and everything like other people do. Your mother is not your real mother. But if you were with that other lady you would be on drugs.”

“On drugs?”

“Think about it. You would be poor and living in some strange place that is ghetto. You would have no father. You would not be able to do things or see things. Then you would just get angry and not go to schools or work and just become a guy that is on drugs or something. That is probably what would have happened to you,” and then he stared into space again, and added nothing else for a while until another thought came and formed itself which he articulated in a matter of fact way as a sort of concise and uncontestable footnote, “That is one of the ways people end up on drugs.”

“But I thought I was bendable...”

“You can still be bendable and on drugs.”

I looked at the square table before us. It had accrued various markings through the years, and these markings were like scars. Even though it had been stained and cared for, the scars always showed through with a strong pronunciation and announcement. It was up to the user of the table whether the scars were seen as flaws or else tokens of character or even matters of fate.

“Do you hate that lady?” he said.

“No.”

“Do you know her?” he asked.

“Not really. Not that well. It's getting too late in the game to bother or really care. The idea of her is fading out.”

“The game?”

“It's an expression.”

“Did you know you had a different mother?”

“No,” I replied, “but everyone else did...”

“I can tell that you are different from your parents. You really have no parents. I guess that is why you are so bendable.”

We put our feet up on the table and considered this. It was getting to be dusk then and we lived for a while in silent minutes that belonged neither to the curt and predictable program of days or the vast freedom of unstructured nights, but rather in spaces in-between places, spaces that were pliant yet full of all kinds of things.

