

fish gut buckets

by Brian Michael Barbeito

There were once shades to the day. Shades and nuances of brightness. Degrees of joy. Grasses bent from soft breezes. Soft breezes like washed fruit, like purple plums in the courtyard of our journey. In the mornings there were anoles watching and so we looked back. Agile and spry, fearful prey of birds, they darted here and there. If we walked the perimeter of the grounds, they'd scurry back to the dark shadows of safety. In the distance old mean women yelled warnings about the dangers of smoking. The one-eyed man road through tropical urban ways with his one-eyed dog. No home between them but two eyes. Always they leaned into the turns, and if the rains came, it was with the sun, and the world could be won with grit, with strong tires, with three dirty frames and two single eyes yes three dirty frames and two single eyes before the city of the dead. In the markings of the world, the always moving world, there were palms and lights. Cars raced forever past the buildings tall and bright. Tiki huts might hide the secrets of the Northern Plains because a Tiki hut would be far enough away to keep the news of the North to itself. That is where the ancient man dried dishes with a towel while he looked to the sky, and the only time he ever spoke was to state that he would like to fly the blimp. Lower than that profane banners raced in the winds but became holy and glorious, transformed by the parchment sun. Rolling clapping waves and the tall ship mural that smiled on the world. It has more hues and inroads of white and more good and turbulent sea than the sea itself. Surely dark-haired women of modernity and denim have some secret knowing, giggling there in tight pants and adorned of purple nail polish at noon and at night. These women can give life and these women can kill. The Pentecostals tried to explain about Jesus, and met any question to the contrary with false humility worn like a broken mask held on by a tethered string. The condemnatory thoughts of the chosen few (that chose themselves). The pier stretched out by where sharks came and men waited with beautiful

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dirty buckets that held strange and dangerous things, buckets with fish guts, buckets with blood, with character, buckets like prophets or a gritty desert walking saviour like Christ might use. In the Northern lands, after it all had taken place, the sun and the nuanced days went away. Everything became what it was and the strip malls remarked to one another with sullenness about their literal and figurative lot. The world alit with merchandise and meals but no ancient bells rang out. There were no men with broken skin and broken hands, of calloused fingers yet beautiful spirit. There were no men with fish guts in bloodied buckets while the waves lap.

Nobody was young and learning and wilful. Nobody was old and revered and approached. Everybody was middle aged, successful, self-actualized, thriving, contented, and dead.

