

Ice

by Ru Freeman

The free tea at the factory owned by united-colors-of-Benetton expatriates is served only to foreigners. There is even a sign: *For Foreigners Only*. You can sip the tea in the crisp up country air and watch the dark-skinned women pick the new leaves, fingers flying not out of desire, but out of necessity: tea is measured by the bushel and it takes a long time to fill the bags on their backs. The break, when they take it is only for the purposes of gazing up at the sun as if praying for shade, praying for rain, praying for something other than the bare, unadulterated heat burning down, the rivulets of sweat seeping in and slipping endlessly down the twisted braid upon each tea-plucker's head. You will leave the tea-joint refreshed, drive for mile upon mile as the road rises and rises again and again until you stop, hungry for a photograph, for your blue-eyed take on my country. You will fiddle with the coins in your pocket, you will watch the tea-pluckers raise their faces, their eyes slow and composed to keep you there, clicking, clicking. Will you make it back to your car before their children begin the race up the mountain? Will you fork out some change? Their feet are sure, they do not slip even when the earth breaks and falls apart. But what of the ice in your heart?

