

Five pieces by A. Sam More

Untitled 1

Here, he sat in the dark. The refrigerator had been empty and unplugged for two months. He stared at the wall mostly. His posture had become very, very good. He'd practiced until his spine was nearly straight. He imagined that if he'd seen a chiropractor that they would have remarked, "only a healthy curve."

His face was mute. His mouth was a practiced dash between his nose and his chin. His eyes were relaxed o's staring directly ahead.

On quiet nights, he could hear the surging of the waves above his own smooth breath. The sound came like gusts of wind pushing up the shores, up the hills from the south and the west.

He thought of the dark dog, who was terribly fond of him. It followed him on odd trips next door to the market and back. The first time it had startled him. He hadn't realized the dog was the same one that lived with the family next to his house. It came so close, stayed so close.

He heard leaves rustle outside. He sat, simply breathing, letting the thought of the dog spread to nothing. A wind blew.

The next morning he went to the market. He bought a loaf of bread and one cup of cacao. The cacao would flavor his almond milk. He would spread peanut butter on the bread. He looked at the side-walk in front of him. There in the pool in the gutter floated a bloated toad, upside-down. He wondered why the many island dogs did not eat the many dead toads.

He turned to walk up the driveway to his house. He saw the dark dog lying in the shade under the pickup truck next door. The dog barked. He watched the tail beat against the ground. The dog barked louder lifting its head to watch him. He continued toward his door. The dog remained lying under the truck.

It was nothing he decided and let the thought of the dog spread to nothing.

pool

He sat, reclined in the tidal pool at Sliding Rock. The small brown dog chewed on the meat at the edge of his hand. The pelagi's eyes seemed to reflect the large cloud above him. The small Samoan children ran giggling in the distance. Out toward the ocean, they threw their bodies. Sliding for yards across the moist algae on the rock.

Eventually, the pack of dogs pulled the pelagi out of the pool. His mouth held its smile as he slid smoothly to the rougher cliffs toward the east. The small brown dog led the pack, pulling its new pelagi. When they reached the shade of a near cliff, the large black dog stepped back offering the small brown dog a choice piece of the pelagi. The small brown dog returned to the pelagi's left hand. He tore at the flesh now, more confident.

The orange wristband of the pelagi's watch finally got in the way. The children were now beginning to slow in their sliding. Their giggling was quiet now, too. The tide was receding. Now the ocean smashed into the edge of the rock, that it once slicked. The water sprayed into the air. The children paused at times. Watching the pieces of water. Watching their sliding rock dry, become hard and sharp.

Once the hand was completely broken off, the wristwatch slid easily over the end of the moist wrist. A large light brown female moved to lick at the thickening red. The small brown dog moved around behind the female. At half the female's height, mounting her was impractical. He tried though, the engorged wet pink meat flashing in the still high sun.

Finally, the children turned away from the ocean. They walked toward the north, to their parents and older siblings who waited just at the edge of the trees, waiting to return to their cool homes. The pelagi laid in the shade of the cliff, while the ocean did its work.

It didn't have to be today

He sat on the couch. The glass-slat windows were all closed now. The smoke had been thickening outside for nearly an hour. It was probably the neighbors cooking their umu to share after church. The smoke had forced him to leave his bedroom and close the windows, though.

Now he sat on the couch, with its brown-esque and glinting sea-foam striped fabric. After only two weeks here, his roommate had been holding up in his bedroom for the past several days. He'd only come out for meals and seldom spoke when he did. The paper towels had run out a week ago, and the last time Chris had glanced at the toilet paper supply, it had dwindled to only two rolls. His roommate had had a bit of a sneeze and cough, but Chris wondered how they'd gone through nine rolls in less than a month. He knew he couldn't afford to buy more everytime at this rate.

So, he sat on the couch, which he had found put-off an odd odor when the higher heats and humidity got into it, and he waited for lunchtime. He'd planned to have Oreos and peanut butter with a bit of chocolate milk. He liked to separate the sides of the Oreos then put a dab of peanut butter on the cream before putting the sides back together and popping the new peanut butter and cream Oreo into his mouth. He planned to begin at 11:30. There were enough Oreos to last him until noon he figured. Then it would only be six hours until dinner time. He began to think about dinner and found some pleasure in the idea of a repeat of last night: a faux-meat pattie with spinach and corn chips.

The plane over-head distracted him from his planning of the day. He thought about the fresh air up there. He thought simply about getting out. It wasn't done here on a Sunday. In the relative metropolis of Pago, Pago, you could get away with walking around on a Sunday. But everyone assured him that this far "out" and further, one shouldn't go tramping about on Sunday. So, he sat on the couch, and began to feel a bit sticky.

'The smoke from the cooking fire would likely be done in another half-hour or so.' The thought soothed him. He would re-open the slats of the windows. The breeze would carry away some of the stickiness that he was feeling. The last of the smoke would be pushed out of the house. It was wonderful to think about. He checked his watch. There was only one minute until Oreo-eating time. He smiled widely inside. Another pleasure growing closer with the certainty of the passing of time. If only all of life could be like that. The dying of a flame and the dispersing of smoke.

He wondered how the next five months would go with this new roommate. And then his watch changed. And it was 11:30.

Untitled 2

In heat they found their greatest reason. The two lolled on the porch in chairs designed to minimize contact with the skin. They sipped on frozen beverages and got up only to replenish themselves from the freezer.

They'd stopped talking in the second week. They still spoke, but it had slowly dropped off to exclude everything but the extremely necessary: confirming logistics for their next day trip; lime or strawberry drink mix tonight. These were also some of the few thoughts that came to their minds.

When she walked to the shower at night before bed, he still thought of her body. There was a crackle in his mind that was every firing a smile that never reached the surface. He felt it more it seemed. The thought of it seeping out under the skin, all through his body.

They didn't sleep in the same bed, though. They'd pushed two beds up beside each other, then pulled them apart less than a foot. It was the humidity and the sticky perspired collection that accumulated. She couldn't stand it, she'd said after a few days. And honestly, he was only able to enjoy it at this point when they were having passionate sex.

He'd thought that passion in the tropics would be natural. Instead even what seemed to start like sessions that would have led to encouraging yelps and resonating moans in the colder climate of home, prompted little more than grunting and a sweaty slickness that changed the sense of engagement that he now realized was such a pleasure.

So, they would lie in their separate beds and sometimes reach out their hands across the space between the beds. They would probe with their fingertips through the stirred air. The ceiling fan would spin at its intense revolution above, and finally they would sense the heat of each other and their probing would cease. Then delicately the fingers would pull back and the two would open themselves to that thing that happened to them in the night, in the tropics, instead of sleeping, like they did back home.

Time to Go to Work

Sometimes, he would slide his small soft hand into his father's. Though the old man no longer fell trees each day, his hands seemed to hold a hardness that neither he nor the boy tried to ignore. The man looked down and smiled.

As he limped up the steps to the apartment, something was forming in the mind of the boy. He watched the motion, and the man, seeing him watch, explained, "my back and knees hurt too much." The boy's mind wondered at the thought, but it was beyond him at the moment. He watched and walked up beside his father, with one leg stiff, like the old man's.

In the apartment, he rubbed the old man's hand. The hardness tickling his own sticky, warm skin. "I would still work in the woods, if I could," the man said, watching the boy. The boy listened and then ran to get his truck from the toy box. He drove the sleek, black semi over the carpet on the living-room floor. As he traced the lines of the carpet's pattern, like the lanes of a highway, his mind set things into a sort of equation. He pattered his lips, making the sound of his own engine, and he tickled himself, smiling at his feeling, which he could not have called understanding.

"Do you wanna see something?" The man asked, from his chair. The boy turned to look at the old man, his semi lifting silently, effortlessly into the air. "Come get in this chair with me." The boy's eyes widened slightly, the extremities of his smile faded. He stood up and slowly walked toward his father. And when he stood between the man's legs, his father reached out to him. The boy's hands relaxed, as the old, hard hands gripped him. The old man grunted, straining to drag the boy up to his lap, and the semi clattered off the edge of the carpet onto the floor.

The boy wriggled, leaning to see the semi. The man groaned an old cry, he struggled to straighten the boy on his lap. The boy struggled to reach the arm, to find the semi. He pulled at the old man's grip, wrenching the old man's upper body. He cried, his hands moved to grip at his spasming pain in his back. The boy made a sound of dull surprise as he toppled over the arm, he'd been trying to reach. He saw the semi, and watched it as he fell, landing on his head.