

CORAL ROAD POEMS BY GARRETT HONGO



ALSO BY GARRETT HONGO

POETRY

The River of Heaven

Yellow Light

NONFICTION

Volcano: A Memoir of Hawai`i



CORAL ROAD

Poems

Garrett Hongo



ALFRED A. KNOFF NEW YORK 2013

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for Hideo and Tsuruko Kubota, I.M.

A spreading oak, that near a linden grows...

Hone`ana i ka mana`

E naue ku`u kino

—Queen Kapi`olani, “Ipo Lei Manu”

Kane wa kachiken

Wash`ya horehore yo

Ase to namida no

Tomo kasegi

—Anon., “Hole Hole Bushi,”

Japanese cane worker’s song, 19th century

This, alas,

Was but a dream: the times had scattered all
These lighter graces, and the rural ways
And manners which it was my chance to see
In childhood were severe and unadorned,
The unluxuriant produce of a life
Intent on little but substantial needs,
Yet beautiful—and beauty that was felt.

—William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1805

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LIST OF MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor of the United States, under Act of Congress approved February 28, 1917, to be enforced

STATES IMMIGRATION OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL

to the United States Immigration Officer in the District Office of the United States, to be enforced

U.S.S. Albatross sailing from Nagasaki, Japan July 1917

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Rank	Profession	Country of Birth	Place of Birth	Marital Status	Education	Occupation	Duration of Stay	Remarks
1	Albatross	35	M	1st	Engineer	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Engineer	10	
2	Albatross	30	M	2nd	Engineer	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Engineer	10	
3	Albatross	25	M	3rd	Engineer	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Engineer	10	
4	Albatross	20	M	4th	Engineer	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Engineer	10	
5	Albatross	15	M	5th	Engineer	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Engineer	10	
6	Albatross	10	M	6th	Engineer	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Engineer	10	
7	Albatross	5	M	7th	Engineer	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Engineer	10	
8	Albatross	30	F	8th	Stewardess	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Stewardess	10	
9	Albatross	25	F	9th	Stewardess	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Stewardess	10	
10	Albatross	20	F	10th	Stewardess	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Stewardess	10	
11	Albatross	15	F	11th	Stewardess	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Stewardess	10	
12	Albatross	10	F	12th	Stewardess	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Stewardess	10	
13	Albatross	5	F	13th	Stewardess	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Stewardess	10	
14	Albatross	30	M	14th	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
15	Albatross	25	M	15th	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
16	Albatross	20	M	16th	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
17	Albatross	15	M	17th	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
18	Albatross	10	M	18th	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
19	Albatross	5	M	19th	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
20	Albatross	30	F	20th	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
21	Albatross	25	F	21st	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
22	Albatross	20	F	22nd	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
23	Albatross	15	F	23rd	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
24	Albatross	10	F	24th	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	
25	Albatross	5	F	25th	Passenger	Japan	Nagasaki	Single	High School	Passenger	10	

An Oral History of Blind-Boy Liliko`i

ame out of Hilo, on the island of Hawai`i,
p-steel and Dobro like outriggers on either side of me,
shamisen strapped to my back as I went up the gangplank
the *City of Tokio* running inter-island
Honolulu and the big, pink hotel on Waikīkī
ere all the work was back in those days.
ought a white linen suit on Hotel Street
soon as I landed, bought a white Panama too,
d put the Jack of Diamonds in my hatband for luck.
f my own, I had only one song, “Hilo March,”
d I played it everywhere, to anyone who would listen,
alking all the way from the Aloha Tower to Waikīkī,
earing out my old sandals along the way.
t that’s okay. I got to the Banyan Tree
t Kalakaua and played for the tourists there.
e bartenders didn’t kick me out or ask for much back.
toh-no-bozu, nah! I went put on the dark glasses and pretend I blind.
played the slack-key, some hulas, an island rag,
d made the tourists laugh singing *hapa-haole* songs,
lf English, half Hawaiian. Come sundown, though,
ad to shoo—the contract entertainers would be along,
d they didn’t want *manini* like me
ealing the tips, cockroach the attention.
l ride the trolley back to Hotel Street
d Chinatown then, change in my pocket,
d a dive on Mauna Kea and play *chang-a-lang*
th the Portagee, *paniolo* music with Hawaiians,
ack-key with anybody, singing harmonies,
aiting for my chance to bring out the *shamisen*.
t there hardly ever was. Japanee people
o come the bars and brothels like before.
ter a while, I give up and just play whatever,
eeling with `ukulele players for fun,
ading licks, make ass, practicing that
ppy-go-lucky all the tourists seem to love.
t smiling no good for me. I like the stone-face,
e no-emotion-go-show on the face,
l feeling in my singing and playing instead.
at’s why Japanee style suits me best.
igin and *gunka*, ballads about warriors
d soldier song in Japanee speech.
ike the key. I like the slap and *chi-to-san* of *shamisen*.

eel like I galvanize
 and the rain go drum on me,
 make the steel go ring inside.
 As when I feel, you know, ass when I right.
 As why me, I like the blues. Hear 'em first time
 from one *kurombo* seaman from New Orleans.
 He come off his ship from Hilo Bay, walking downtown
 in front the S. Hata General Store
 on his way to Manono Street looking for
 the crap game or play cards or something.
 In a sitting barber shop, doing nothing but reading book.
 He singing, yeah? sounding good but sad.
 He said den he bring his funny guitar from case,
 with shining metal with *puka* holes
 like one pointsettia spidering over the box.
 He make the tin-kine sound, good for vibrate.
 He make da kine shake innah bones sound
 like one engine innah blood. Penetrate.
 He teach me all kine songs. Field hollers, he say,
 like kine slave g'on use for call each oddah
 from field to field. Ju'like cane workers.
 He said rags and marches and blues all make up
 from diss black buggah from Yazoo City,
 on-river and a ways, the blues man say.
 He looky. No can forget. Ass how I learn for sing.

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LIST OF MANIFEST OF ALIEN IMMIGRANTS FOR THE COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRATION

Jan 11, 1911

Reported by the ship's officer to the Honorable the United States Dept. of Commerce, December 31, 1910, to be delivered to the Commissioner of Immigration by the Processing Officer of any vessel having such passengers on board, upon arrival at a port in the United States.

S.S. *Osaka*, sailing from *Honolulu*, Dec. 2, 1910, arriving at port of *Honolulu*, Dec. 11, 1910

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Mar.	Prof.	Place of Birth	Country of Birth	Imm. Status	Admission	Remarks
1	<i>Frank J. Jensen</i>	41	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
2	<i>William J. Jensen</i>	38	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
3	<i>John J. Jensen</i>	35	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
4	<i>William J. Jensen</i>	32	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
5	<i>John J. Jensen</i>	29	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
6	<i>William J. Jensen</i>	26	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
7	<i>John J. Jensen</i>	23	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
8	<i>William J. Jensen</i>	20	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
9	<i>John J. Jensen</i>	17	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
10	<i>William J. Jensen</i>	14	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
11	<i>John J. Jensen</i>	11	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
12	<i>William J. Jensen</i>	8	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
13	<i>John J. Jensen</i>	5	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
14	<i>William J. Jensen</i>	2	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	
15	<i>John J. Jensen</i>	0	M	Mar.	Seaman	<i>Honolulu</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	Imm.	Adm.	

Ed. No. 15102 at *Quarantine* Sta.

All Ketchikan

I

CORAL ROAD

The Festival of San Giovanni

range ghosts of torchlight washing over the innocent faces around me,
and it's like we're children again—three doctors, a philosopher, my wife, and I—
ekked down from the Austrian villa up the promontory to a Lombardian village
and its festival shore of Lago di Como on the dockside steps
of the Grand Hotel Serbelloni.

nelly and McGrath lead our group's processional, hoisting their stalks of flames,
gathering us under their sponsoring globes of light, while we follow down the
curve of asphalt drive
to a lakeside walkway, the cool dusk descending in a choir
of slate cloud-cover, a light chop-kicking up,
fishermen on the shoreline dipping their poles, the crowd around us
murmurous with glee.

In Hawai`i, along the North Shore,
we who remember sometimes make another pilgrimage, from Waialua to Hale`iwa,
then along the old railway route past Waimea and the Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church,
to lookout Jesus on the topmost bend in the road, garlanded with leis from passersby,
to Pupukea and below the bluffs past Pipeline to Sunset Beach and the beginning
of the Castle & Cooke sugar lands,
the fields abandoned now, unruly museum of gigantic grasses,
green and tasseled elegies of loss.

the path we take winds along Bellagio's lakefront, past the ferry terminals
and old promenade,
under the ginkgo trees by the ruined boathouse and little strip of park
where they have the monthly flea market, then up the road past the Villa Melzi
and its kept gardens
that Byron and Shelley once admired, that Liszt and his lover used for rendezvous.
There are deep, green lawns,
monumental shadows swimming along the ground and up the walls of each villa we pass,
gifts of conversation like blossom-filled boats scenting the air
with cloudbursts of Spanish,
winddrifts of English and Italian.

1919, twenty Japanese laborers once fled their contracts, the first in the islands
who dared strike—
for better pay, write historians, but, to me and this murk of night, it was
for the story of it.
Think of them, wrapped in wind, as I am tonight, bowl of the Pacific at their
left shoulders as they fled,
halloping of freedom on the horizon beyond where they could see, its fisherman

pulling his line,

checking his traps, slowly raveling up his string of baited baskets
behind the shimmering wake of his drifting boat, bark of promise
visible to none but the settling dark.

Coral Road

deep wanting to go back, across an ocean, blue-gray and uncaring,
white cowlicks of waves at the continental shore, then the midsea combers
like white centipedes far below the jetliner that takes me there.

and across time too, to 1919 and my ancestors fleeing Waialua Plantation,
pecking across the northern coast of O`ahu, that whole family

of first Shigemitsu

walking in *geta* and sandals along railroad ties and old roads at night,

peeping in the bushes by day, *ha`alelehana*—runaways

from the labor contract with Baldwin or American Factors.

My grandmother, ten at the time, hauling an infant brother on her back,

and did there was a white coral road in those days, pieces of crushed reef

colored like gravel over the brown dirt, and, at night, with the moon up,

it was those nights during their flight, silver shadows on the sea,

lit their path like a roadway made of dust from the Ocean of Clouds.

uki-no-michi is what they called it, the Moon Road from Waialua to Kahuku.

There is little to tell and few enough to tell it to—

small circle of relatives gathered for reunion

at some beach barbecue or Elks Club veranda in Waikiki,

all of us having survived that plantation sullenness

and two generations of labor in the sugar fields,

having shed most all memory of travail and the shame of upbringing

the clapboard shotguns of ancestral poverty.

Who else would even listen?

Where is the Virgil who might lead me through the shallow underworld of this history?

And what demiurge can I say called to them, loveless ones,

through twelve-score stands of cane

chattering like small birds, nocturnal harpies in the feral constancies of wind?

*

Light is diffuse, like knowledge at dusk, a veiled shimmer in the sea

as schools of baitfish boil and revolve in their iridescent globes,

turning to the olive dark and the drop-off back to depth below,

where they shiver like silver penitents—a cloud of thin, summer moths—

while rains chill the air and pockmark the surface of the sands at Sans Souci,

and we scatter back inside to a humble Chinese buffet and cool *sushi*

spread on Melamine platters on a starched white ribbon of shining cloth.

Waimea-of-the-Dead

aimea, a village on Kaua`i's southwest shore, is where they went first—
atched huts and mud floors, sewers for streets, or pathways, really,
ke sluices in heavy rains—human mire, cane bagasse, and runoff around their feet.

vent there once, but it was summer, and I was with my sons, our first gentle ones.
ey were teen and preteen then, soft and bewildered by everything—
e turquoise Gatorade half-bowl of Hanalei Bay, calm as bathwater,
`ikalo taro fields, brown terraces of tremulous green hearts
rolling in the light afternoon wind,
d the viridian elephant's feet of mountains rising into lavish clouds
purple as *poi*.

e hiked the swampy Alaka`i one day and saw birds big as crows,
t plumed like parakeets, fiery orange and yellow, and stared
the ribboned varicolors of rocky chasms and felt the wind lift us from our collars
flapping like loose sails.

ne night, the clearest evening of the year, I took them to Bon Odori,
here the living dance for the expiation of the dead caught in limbo
to release them from trial and permit a passage to *nirvana*—an ultimate heaven.
counterclockwise in summer robes, holding fans, twirling loose, draping sleeves,
e dancers would circle around the *yagura*, a tower in the middle of a ball field,
d laughter would rise like sugary smoke from the broiling fires at every booth,
hile folks clapped hands to *ondo* rhythms, pre-millennium country tunes
out the rice harvest, mining coal, or simply lovelorn travail.
lways liked the clarinets and saxophones, honking softly like pelicans at the shore—
eir old, pentatonic melodies and lugubrious trills, cornier-than-thou.

it my sons grew up with none of these, far from this past that was, to me,
e *real* world and its genuine glory—not the strained exile I suffered
ishing a grocery cart up the cereal aisles of a sad Safeway.

*

This was home to me—
andering a sandy parade ground while the PA blared with *min'yō* and lantern lights
bbed like glass floats along the intricate nets of electrical wire strung above us,
e barker's call of the next tune and his welcome of a dance club from Maui,
en in their seventies, fit and muscled, with white-haired crew cuts and creviced faces,
omen in ricebag aprons and embroidered shawls, *geta* clapping their heels
as they walked
om pool to luminous pool of neighbors and friends, the pre-school children
ouching arrhythmically inside the dance-ring and stamping their feet
just behind the beat.

we flowed along, anonymous to all, gathering brief, impolite stares,
or, although we might look as if we belonged, no one knew us,
not even the favor of our faces, as none shared our blood, and we were strangers
to this edge of Paradise,
ourselves ghosts of our ancestors among the living of Waimea,
who could barely see us, squinting, rubbing their eyes, and blinking,
trying to bring our bodies into focus, our faces like shadows in a mirror,
houettes of darkened lanterns not quite lit by the glow from another close by.

I thought to make a prayer then, and we took a few steps away from the dancing
towards the long, flower-lined entry path to the shrine and offertory,
decorative, straw-wrapped tubs of *shōyu* stacked in pyramids along
each side of the *butsuma*.

I bowed the boys the slow way to approach, heads bowed, hands in *gasshō*,
I myself learned at the monastery, the priest taking my hands and lifting
my thumbs,
tucking my head firmly and inclining it down like a barber would a boy's.
I did then the three-point genuflection—knees on the floor, forehead touching
the carpet,
hands upraised over the ears as if they were flowers floating on the surface
of a pool
where you'd just dipped your face to search its bottom for roots.

Amida Butsu we murmured, *Homage to the World-Compassionate One*,
I did a winding veil of *emptiness* spun alert inside my heart, stranger in these shadows,
my soul aswerve like a battered moth, misdirected in summer flight
by the gentle web of pitching festival lights.

Pupukea Shell

think of the old Pupukea Shell station on Kamehameha Highway—
two pumps, '60s glass-and-concrete architecture, a roll-up, two-car garage front,
mortise-and-tenon awning, and the great, yellow *Pecten langfordi*,
short collar under the fanlike ribs, floating like a child's painting
of a sunrise
above the straightaway seafloor of asphalt road just past Chun's Reef
along the North Shore.
I never meant the corporate name to me, but rather the moon in summer seasons,
its only competitor for luminescence nights we drove the highway back
from Honolulu,
and those nights on the Fourth when cousins would hand me sparklers already lit,
then a huge toad, dry and cold in my hands and on my shoulders,
then an amber strip of dried and sweetened cuttlefish, chewy and aromatic.
The station was owned by relatives—the Yoshikawas, sturdy Moloka'i people married
into us Shigemitsus,
who hosted the summer gatherings of the matriarchal clan at their gas station
and grounds—
with it back a Meiji-style peaked and fluted roof house,
splendid lawns, plumeria trees, and *tī* plants at the property lines.
This is near Shark's Cove where all the tourists and some locals snorkel now,
diving for bubbly glimpses of blue fantailed fish,
schools of yellow tangs, and the rotor-finned *humuhumu*.
When I see it these days, boarded up and rusting,
the window glass of the office spiderwebbed with cracks,
the pumps gone like pulled teeth and the timbers and underside of the awning
darkened with mildew and spotted with blooms of a brown, fungal scourge,
I remember that a pair of lovers met there once—a shopgirl and a dark local boy
with long, black surfer's hair reddened by the sun.
He wore jeans and a brown shirt that said "Cecilio" across his breast,
and the thick, calloused hands of a laborer, but eyes that shone like light
striking the sandy bottom of the sea in the soft waters of the lagoon just offshore.
He wrote in a small copybook every day,
scribblings and verses on his lunch break,
his bare feet wicking in and out of the blue rubber sandals he wore
as he bent over the pages.
He'd take the night shift, summer or winter, keep the lights on and pumps going
for all the locals and tourists till past midnight, frogs singing, the air cool as thought.
It was the only station open past six on the whole North Shore,
and it got the business of commuters to town and all the straggler tourists
headed late back to Waikīkī.

Cecilio liked the inconstant flow, the chance to meditate between customers
he scanned lamplit eyes over the pink lagoon at sunset, imagining *whatevah*
in the silence of cormorants,
black pens dipping their yellow beaks into the magentaed seas.

Once, just before closing, when Cecilio was at his desk bending over Creole pentameters,
a wanderer came by on foot, tapping at the glass of the office, making him glance
away from his strange, literate work.

“I saw a light,” she said, uncovering her hair,
which she had shielded beneath silver-gray silk. “And I’ve lost my way.
Can I rest here a while?”

But from where did she come? this *haole fanciulla* dressed in thin, black clothes,
shawl like a Portuguese grandmother’s,
Chinese dancing shoes made for acrobats buckled at the back,
skin like goat’s milk fresh in the pail, and black, black curly hair?

She was a vision like the Mary who gave the Virgin Birth
he knew from Catholic school, and like the stories people told of Pele,
the goddess testing the mortal by taking human form.

*

But she suppose’ to be ol’...

Cecilio said within, rising from his battered chair, its wooden legs scraping
the concrete floor,
his breath growing shallower to witness beauty immaculate amidst the mundane.

“My name is Lucia,” she said. “I paint island flowers on beach glass...
I embroider orchid boats on linen seas ...”

And the midnight half-moon
rose like a spreading, silver fan floating on the ink-dark ocean of the sky.

Cane Fire

the bend of the highway just past the beachside melon and papaya stands,
at the gated entrance to the Kuilima Hotel on the point where Kubota once
loved to fish,
the cane fields suddenly begin—a soft green ocean of tall grasses
and waves of wind rolling through them all the way to the Ko`olau,
a velvet green curtain of basalt cliffs covered in mosses.
Makana Store comes up then, *makai* side of the highway, *towards the sea*,
old, whatever it looks like now—curio conchs dangling from its porch rafters
surrounded with birdcages of painted bamboo, wooden wafers of old shave-ice
cones and prices—
think of stories and photos from nearly a century ago
when Gang no. 7 worked *hoe-hana* and *happai-ko* out near here,
ending to weed the hoe rows or shouldering a thirty-pound bundle of sticky cane,
trying not to think of the fresh tubs of cold *tōfu* lying on the wet plank floors
in its grocery aisles
of the money they owed for bags of rice, cans of Crisco, and *moxa* pellets
they used for flaming the skin on their backs at night, relieving aches with
flashes of pain,
remembering fire was for loneliness, smoke was for sorrow.

and, if I see a puffer fish, dried and lacquered, full of spikes and pride,
suspended over a wood-frame doorway as I glance back while driving by,
or if the tall television actor with long blond hair and a cowboy's gait
walks from the parking lot towards the picnic tables of the decrepit shrimp shack
where the old icehouse used to be, where the cameras and film crew now stand,
I'm not going to lean forward into wanting or desire, amusements of my time,
but remember instead that Pine Boy died here one afternoon in 1925.

I know this because I count from the year my grandmother was born in 1910,
the year Twain died and the comet passed close to them sitting among the cane at night,
a pearly fireball and long trail of alabaster light over the empty Hawaiian sea,
and forward to the story of how she was fifteen when the *lunas* called her to calm him.

*

Matsuo was her adopted brother, a foundling of Hawaiian blood raised Shigemitsu
and sent, at sixteen, to work the cane fields with his brothers and uncles.
No incidents until the day the field bosses ordered cane fires to be lit,
workers oiling the roots and grass, torchers coming through to light the cane,
turning its leaves down to harvestable stalks that could be cut and stacked.

Something flamed in Matsuo too, because he grabbed a *luna* and cut his throat,
and ran into the blazing fields, and could be heard whimpering *ju'like one pig*,

s cries coming through the rising smoke and crackle of the cane fires.

hat words he said I've never been told—only that he moved within the fields,
aying ahead or within the fire, and could not be coaxed out
or pursued with dogs or on a horse.

nong the Gang, there was no one who doubted his own death
should they follow him.

it Tsuruko, his sister, was called, *tita* who had nursed with him,
ished out of school and brought in the manager's car out to the fields,
he man opening the door and taking her hand *as if she haole wahine ladat!*
she stepped from the cab and onto the scorched plantation earth.

ie image I have is of her walking over opened ground absolutely cleared of cane,
ie brown and black earth mounded up around her as she stood among small hillocks
as if a score of graves had just been dug,
ie soft, inconstant breezes pressing a thin cotton dress against her skin,
er back to the crowd while she says something into the wind that only the cane
and Matsuo could hear.

id then his crying ceased and he emerged magically from a curtain of smoke and cane,
s eyes tarred and patched with burnt oil and charcoaled with molasses.
e stood out for an instant, in front of wicking flames,
en felt the bead of a rifle on him, and he slipped quickly back in,
ie cane fires muffling whatever words he might have called as they took him.

*

ie crouching lion of a lava bluff juts near the road,
id I know the jeep trail will come up next,
cattle fence and white and brown military sign its marker.
s where the radar station is, far past the fields and up-mountain
here the sluice waters start and the apples blossom,
aving white popcorn flowers dappling the mud with faint,
perishable relicts of rage and beauty.

A Child's Ark

At Los Angeles summer days, late '50s, a seven-year-old
sat in the tiny midtown apartment on South Kingsley Drive,
flipped on the TV to the black-and-white game shows,
hourly comedies and half-hour detective dramas,
avoiding the acting company, avoiding the soaps, news, and cartoons.

One of my favorites for a while was a show called *Kideo Village*,
in which kids would wind their way through the attractive curves
of a game path spooling through the sound studio and its faux lampposts,
past minimalist archways, doors, pushcarts, and street stands
set up and interspersed along the telegenic route—
a bakery, a toyshop, the ice cream parlor, etc.
The tragedies strewn in the way would be a bookstore or piggy bank—
for one you'd have to lose a turn and stay inside to read a book,
for the other, you'd give up spending for a certificate of virtue.

The glory was a pet store of fluffy animals—
nose-twitching rabbits bearing sachets of cash around their necks,
a dog hitched to a wagon filled with sacks of stage gold.
The health was the message, the child contestants obliged
to exercise the right energy and enterprise
to run themselves briskly through the board's intricate arrangement
of pleasure, danger, and delight without risk,
their assignment to luck into opportunities
that would set off crescendos of bells ringing,
video *paradisos* of lights flashing through the transparent Lucite
under their feet.

That it was splendor and the minute articulations of a fantasy village's architecture
that mesmerized me, that a child could skip along in a moment's time
without having to be put in a car or be handled by adults,
that a candy store, movie house, or shop full of cream puffs.
Excitement and surprise were everywhere just on the next luminous square
around the looping turn on the glittering game board.

When the power went out one day, or perhaps when the show was canceled,
I got out scissors, paper, and pens, Crayolas arranged in stick puddles
on the dingy, carpeted floor of the apartment's living room,
tapping out a village of my own on wax paper from a kitchen drawer.
I found empty green stationery boxes my mother brought home from work,
I tore the labels off, drew on them, marked rectangles for doors;
I cut windows, made folding blinds, used the leftover cutouts

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