

• A BOONDOCK •

Lisa was the first girl in my life
I asked to dance. I mean, a brass band
was playing early jump blues, not a Louis

Jordan situation, but, you know, the Andrew
Sisters, bugle boy and company B, that business.
Anyway, we were a shave under nine years old,

two hearing kids in an American Sign Language
performance group. And when we were done
signing the lyrics to “God Bless America,”

and after the polite applause of donors
circled back into olives drowning in gin,
the dance floor opened. I asked Lisa Colaco

(she loved to say like Cola Company)
to dance, sheepishly, looking an inch above
my glasses, thinking what would it be

to gently press my brown cheek to one
of her freckles. I’ll be dammed if my desires
will ever be that simple again.

Her father was a Catholic from India.
She had his features and dark
hair, but her mother’s Nebraskan

complexion. I remember being afraid
for no reason and my hand was shaking
like I was signing “applause,” when she

put it on her hip, lassoed my neck
and we spun. I didn’t know a waltz
from a Roger Rabbit. All I could think

is scarecrow, Michael Jackson, I mean
imitate an ease on down the road.
We rocked these blue as sky-lite t-shirts

decorated with hand prints. A fundraising
situation for *Be an Angel*, this NGO founded
by Lisa’s family. My mama must’ve known it

was gonna be one of those fly in a bowl
of milk moments so she insisted my pants
rest above my navel, shirt tucked, Vaseline

like YWHW’s own glory across my forehead.
Call me Moses at the foot of Sinai. My tablets:
a pair of left feet. Just kidding. I was Gregory

Hines in a Harlem night, and if there was a golden
calf, Lisa and I were it. When Lisa moved
I moved and just like that we knew

we'd never see a promised land. Instead of stones
the donors threw their eyebrows in the air
forgetting how colorblind they'd been before gin.

• ANTI-CONFESSIONAL III •

This isn't a secret; I have failed
to love with the patience of hibiscus root
whose buds bloom with no thought
of being tea. I have not loved
my innocence, overdressed in morning light.
How can the earth keep turning
to the thing that will kill it? Oh Sun,
bring me a warm hill in August,
an echo of a fragile and immortal green,
a better remembrance
of my grandma's eyes. I have failed
to forget love is one of many
higher choruses, and yes there are octaves
of light that linger. Can we still call love
love anymore? Or have we avoided failure?
Every ode must fail, if there is to be a higher love.

• WHEN I FEEL A WHOOP COMIN' ON •

for the feast of Whitsuntide & Afterschool Dances

ain't the butter

fly, it's the tootsee

roll the speakers

pose as a polemic
against your narrow hips

this circle's musk
classmates grinding like
black pepper in a cheap mill—
uneven, coarse. Shamelessly
you practice outside

the arc of polo shirts, crop-
tops and starchy jeans sharp
enough to cut penumbras
from 8th graders. Summon
an adolescent faith to push

past the girl who laid her tongue
in your mouth like a lisp on a field
trip to the zoo right
in front of the rhino
exhibit. Your lonely Afro-
Latino blood bids

the center of hype,
oooooh, and funk to be
filled with your inheritance—
flat feet, a skinny boy's sense
of rhythm, and a soft uptown fade.

Go boy, Go
you've only heard
in church. This dance is
different than the holy
ghost shout filling half

an hour on Sunday
nothing like the body
rock of your father's bachata
he'd pull out to prove men
with flat asses could dance.

Still you press and press
throw your knees like bolos
catch up to the dj's scratch in
time for the song to switch
choruses—Boyz II Men: *don't wait*

til the water runs dry. Those
violins still weep for the awkward

slow drags you'll soon try
but there's a two second panoply
where you've imitated the other

boys in their non-battered fly
in their roll tout-suite. There
at least a hip moment of locomotion
where no one could charge
you with a lack of blackness.

To the left, to the right
more flame than Pentecost,
eyes like two upper rooms
wholly ghosted, your body
becoming a tongue, spoken.

• UNMASKING THE CHORUS •

July doesn't beg. The cicadas are coughing
through their tymbals and couldn't care less
whether anyone dreams of wings.

Acquire a husk they hum
like a cigarette hums alone in an ashtray
(tree?), a sound that stretches like the skin

of a snare drum. Duncce.
Abandon has its own bandwagon
and the confederacy of late summer's heat
can't assuage. Boredom. The horizon

sighs like a churchwarden pipe. *I could die*
on this tree the cicadas sing,
coughing themselves rare and blue
like a husk of song, the lyrics but not the tune.

• ODE TO LANDO CALRISSIAN •

If you were stuntin' in a galaxy far, far away, blue cape
suave, with a gold lining that would shame the sun
with a cool walk and a gambler hustle,

if you had a hair style so fresh, you'd claim
to have won it off an out-of-work cloud
city cosmetologist, if even your eyebrows

had scoundrel in their arch, if everybody knew
the music bumped cargo hold to cockpit in the Millennium

Falcon, a name straight out of P. Funk,
if everyone could see those hands churning
the dark dream of stars into the buttermilk

of a hip brother running his own city,
if we asked, *where are all the black people*
in the galaxy? Would you help us? Would you bet on us?

• SUPREMACY •

Consider the shuttlecock
its deft lightness, its rubber nose
unbent, its attention to racket,
its fear of the ground, its willingness
to lob or smash, its whiteness, its penchant
for being held
afloat by the slightest breeze and histories
of swing, how it needs to be
batted between two players,
how it recognizes their want;
consider its feathers, its plastic, its conical
shape suggesting hierarchy, and always
its weight in your hand, how it seeks to be served.