

NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF THE BROWN BOY AND THE WHITE MAN

One house is red, up on a red mountain. The house is windowless and cold. In the garage of the red house is a car and in that car is a red button. This button does nothing. The car is silver and has four black wheels with silver rims, one covered in dirt. The dirt is not from the mountain.

In the red house are a brown boy and a white man. They hate each other. It smells clean. Love is the smell of their hate. The brown boy in the red house imagines murdering the white man. Cutting up a body is a concern of the brown boy, but never of the white man, who is big and strong and innocent of such a thought.

One house is clear. No plants. See-through. Just animals made of sipping noises, steel flashes, and tintured skin flaps. There is a different stink in the clear house. There is sound in that house, papers clicking and burps, the smell from the brown boy and the white man eating and shitting there.

The brown boy brings home clear shelves to hold newspapers and glossy cutouts of more brown people. The brown boy needs space to work. The white man will make space for the brown boy, who he wishes would grow up to be a nice man. The brown boy is mean and wants to live in the garage with the silver car and the silver walls the white man painted around the car to match. He loves the white man. It is true love. The brown boy gets what he wants. The white man gives the brown boy whatever he asks for.

The clear house cannot be burned down. The house is not made of plastic, sulfur, or anything that would ever melt or burn. But the red house is burning away slowly, though not from fire. Fire won't occur there. Besides, the white man would smell fire. The brown boy would spot fire. Bleach, cleaner, cleaning fluid eats into the rugs in the red house. The brown boy kills bugs with household products. He is a murderer and a torturer, a baby and a jerk that would like to kill insects, fart, and take naps forever.

The white man sometimes has bad breath and asks questions only to get insulted in both houses. The brown boy ignores the white man's question: *What ah you doin?* Coughing, scrunching papers, and anything that derides his brown life, the brown boy will either ignore or notice whenever he feels like it.

At lunch, the brown boy noticed the smallest bulge of another white man disappear as the pig ate a pile of fries and swallowed a green pickle in three bites. He told the white man about the eating that he saw. He named the fat pig Tub-O-Lard. *Tub-O-Lard eats his burger upside down so the round bun can tank down to his fat gut. Tub-O-Lard eats an entire onion ring in one bite.*

The white man and the brown boy have in common only what is fantasized by the brown boy when they eat together. But in the silver car, the white man tells the brown boy he will be eighty one day, staring out of a window unable to move and still talking about everyone he sees. The brown boy wants to be a thin, white woman with pelvic-less hips and dancer-damaged legs, teetering in calfskin pants and priceless flats. The brown boy never

dreams of being his own body. He only longs after big white men. The white man slips on his black coat and asks the brown boy what he needs. The white man will go to the gym. The brown boy will go for a jog whenever he is ready.

THE BROWN BOY DREAMS HIS FATHER IS WHITE AND THIN

The brown boy's mother is light, almost the color of milk that has been lit with sun and boiled. Since she was proud of her body, the brown boy's mother rarely wore clothing in her house, and he often saw her naked. Since she ran marathons, played tennis, and made ceramic sculptures, she was often tired.

When he was a child, the brown boy, at his mother's request, would step on her legs, walking up and back down the thighs and calves. Sometimes his brother would walk with him, pacing up to the thigh where they looked down at her. If she fell asleep, they could leave. Though he remembers feeling good that he made her feel good, he also remembers being roused from play to step on her. Asking her when he could stop was like trying to get out of his room after being punished and exiled there. He would go out into the living room in intervals, where his mother and father were waiting and ask:

Can I come out now?

You're already out, aren't you?

Finished yet, Mom? If he said this in well-spaced intervals, it could work to free him. Early on, the brown boy recognized when and how his behavior could both trap him and give him freedom.

In the dream, the brown boy's mother is adjusting her bra. His father is black, almost the color of a coffee bean roasted from green to light brown. The brown boy knows this from the sequence of beans in bins that he saw at

Starbucks. His black father has a nipple on his back and his skin is *loose*, which is how he explains his soft and fatty skin to his son.

The white father in the dream is thinner than the black father. The dreamed man had dry and tight skin with a light brushing of hair on his torso. There they were: He remembers the back of his mother, her shoulders arcing to the left and her hair, a solid black splotch. He remembers his black father standing upright, aware that his skin was also white, dry, and lightly hairy, but unaware that his muscle would soon give up to the soft fat that lurked below.

When he wakes, the white man is there. Not his father or anything like the man in the dream, the white man is sitting upright in meditation. He meditates every day, twice a day. The brown boy loves this time, because he can pick and stare at the white man's aging body. He gazes at the hairs that sprout out of him, the brown errant ones around the nipples, the hard black ones that grow below his shoulder.

Sometimes the brown boy looks up at the white man's face and raises his brown hand slowly up to it, moving close, then closer to his head, almost undetected. When the white man notices his hand, he bats it away and calls him a pest. This makes the brown boy relax. But when he wakes up from his dream, he is too tired from having it to bother his white man. The brown boy thinks the word *white* when he looks up at the white man meditating, but hears something else like *c'mon* or a grunt and slides between his legs and falls asleep there, thinking only about his black father's erasure.

IRRATIONAL DESIRE

The white man is in Boston. The brown boy is at his gym, in Manhattan, below the street in the locker room. The pool just beyond the heavy steel door is an expanse of salty water with bits of floating skin, mucus, and a string of hair that wraps around his goggles and clings to his mouth.

The brown boy, who has had enough of eating hair and swimming, leaves the pool. On the way to the locker room, he spots a white man with grey hair and a hard clayish face, floating in the twelve-foot section, wading near the ladder and struggling to keep his head above water. His exercise for the afternoon: *treading*.

The brown boy waits in the locker room, hoping the grey man will tire and join him in the sauna, come in from his struggle and lie back so near to death only to get sucked. Stretching out the back of his calf and pushing his heel into the wet and slick floor bottom, the brown boy thinks: *What does he want?*

What would he think as I sucked? A string of old white women in suits with floral heads? Ethyl? Tea? A scone? Marmalade? Chowder? A feeding?

The grey man stands in front of a row of lockers wearing a thin tee-shirt, a cloth membrane over the pink and hairy skin glowing beneath. When the brown boy passes him, he breathes deeply the smell of the unwashed and old man swimmer, the worker in him, his deadening ability to scrub himself free of his old BO.

He sees but doesn't believe the paper-thinness of his boxer shorts, waistline tight around his gut and its brown, hand-sewn seam cutting up the left leg. The brown boy wonders who's sewn him back together. He imagines a wife, but would rather picture the old man sewing his own clothes back together alone, alone and even more alone picking out the dead black sock with the holed heel that he slides over his almost useless foot. He is pleased about its loneliness, too, the untended nails, brown and thick with fungus. The brown boy knows he wants to be near this growth—the old man's smallest decay, the slow and peaceful host attached to this dying man.

The grey man is not his white man. His is living, without neglect, and made to scrub his heel down to smooth. The brown boy's white man has even taken to a nightly ritual, where he covers his feet with a prescription salve and sleeps during the week wearing thick socks. Because his feet are now smoother than the brown boy's, the white man has chastised the brown boy into using a similar cream on his feet each night, though the brown boy would never go so far as to wear socks to bed.

In the locker room, the brown boy leers into the grey-headed man's left calf, white and hairless, shot with varicose veins that look to him like green and purple starbursts. It is this explosion of inert blood that he loves, and against which there are several metaphors: coral growing in the sea, rust around steel, algae at the base of dying flowers, wax collecting on the outside of candles. In the old man's locker is a green jacket with heavy brown thread spiraling up a

pocket. A pair of jeans, light-blue-almost-white and worn to death, sits there crumpled in the corner, where the brown boy is watching the brown, hand-sewn seam tighten around a white, frayed hole.