

The Candy Lady

by Keith F. Miller Jr.

It was on that day that I realized pride could be bought with 25 cents
where blue tongues and orange fingers revealed
the intricate interlocking truths of all youth
spawned on the lawn of the projects.
Squeaky swings on rickety rods of promise
we leaned forward and then back
backs arched as our ankles kissed the dirt
and then the sky, at the same time.
High we fly over our single mothers
breaking their backs to bring meals
as they live on bended knee
the world kneeling on their throats
daring them to breathe
in front of grandmas confined to porches
after decades of cleaning
til their knees have no caps
and their sockets are filled with metal balls.
We squeak into better thoughts of living anywhere but here.
But my dear, be not mistaken
this isn't about the story of a broken boy that's shaken
or a tortured girl that's taking everything she's grown to love while faking.

NO

This ain't that kind of story, so don't push me
over the monkey bars and force me to relive the scars
of feeling mauled by more than junkyard dogs
chained to cars who would chase me
over the fences and in the yard where they'd place me
ten at a time where they'd break me
my soul stuck in the hole of a sole-less shoe.
But please don't forget this ain't about me—it's about you.

It was on that day that I learned hope could be bought with 50 cents
where sweet wrappers and rectangle candies
were better than the four walls of my existence
or shall I just call it home.
Bear it with me as I do it justice,
just us with shiny foreheads,
smelling of chicken and Crisco
glistening hair cuts and colorful barrettes
coated with her favorite grease, green magic
mad at the fact that we never woke up to find it was all a joke,
that we won't actually broke but rich--psyche ya mind...quit playin!
only to tell daddy and find he ain't never been there
Ain't that some...shhh....
If momma catch us she'll knock us three ways from Sunday
and we'll be stuck reliving Mondays on repeat
in a class where math looks as freaky as jujitsu
amidst the hieroglyphics and ancient calculators
nodding our heads to shield our broken pride

saying everything but that we feel like a dummy
while passing notes about what happened
after playing hide go seek, seek n freak
when I was alone kicking rocks on top of rocks in dirty socks
with holes hiding between clenched toes
remembering the time we sweet talk the old lady
at the country store to give us mo' than just her pretty smile and bad attitude.

NO

This ain't that kind of story so don't push me
over the white walls and crooked calls
and the ball I could never throw straight
but in a figure eight with tears flowing
and me crying while blaming the daddy that wasn't there
glaring through jammed fingers of the man who tried
only wanting him to get like daddy and get gone while
ghosts of boys with hands on their hips making kissy lips
mocked the man I felt I wasn't and never wanted to be.
Where we sported chipped teeth from the need to crash
into one another to prove points about wants
and why nobody ever thought about us except
the black tops on white cops who broke daddy's scotch
and his arm in front of everybody's porch
right after we all did the bus stop, boogie,
cupid shuffle, wobble and then the electric slide.
We sighed and then I lied... because I was taught
to always say I never saw nothing
so the wrong people don't say they saw you
but this ain't about me—it's about you.

It was on that day I realized that love could be bought with 100 cents, aka a dolla'
and with toothless grins you showed us
you could be a millionaire and have nothing
a celebrity without paparazzi
and a father and a mother
with what a million kids did
to fill the old coffee can with the red lid
with our riches...quarter, nickels, dimes and pennies
From the laundromat and under the sofa cushions
where older brothers and fast sisters were gettin' it
while mom was at work helping us dream
of a better life worth living far away from here.
In the beginning God didn't create heaven and earth
he created you, and all the aunties and uncles
who made thrills like none other...
Not even you...
our heart, the smarts,
the straight-up-get-it-while-it's good
the one and only Candy Lady.