

Calamity, Listen for My Step

We didn't mention the snide-remarking
Caucasians swelling the ranks of the job-line,
the quiet Hispanics murmuring *lápiz, por favor*
and nesting their tiny children in colorful
blankets on the plastic benches;
the loud defiant young blacks
arguing Grenada, Panama, Desert Storm
with haggard Vietnam veterans.

We didn't mention the pregnant drop-out
chain-smoking, her belly ballooning
the Harvard sweat-top, the mismatched green
bottoms mud-spattered about the ankles;
her husband, the HIV positive car thief
drinking coffee with the crowd of ex-cons
down-hall outside seventeen parole officer's
offices.

We talked instead about movies, mortgages,
of our own children temporarily secure
from this nightmare; their clothing clean
sketching happily with unbroken crayons
stick-figure parents and warm houses
while Montessori debutantes feed them
biscuits and juice.

We didn't mention our jobs because people
cease to be and become forms distributed to,
caseloads and social security numbers.
This detachment is easy. It's job survival.
Fill the desktop with family photographs,
sports and college memorabilia, *Fortune*,
The Atlantic, *Psychology Today*, *The Seattle
Times*.

People become momentary
diversions of your day—small, lost,
ghost-voiced irritations crowding
the cinder track of new world order.

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