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# Awakening

Alan Soldofsky

San Jose State University, [alan.soldofsky@sjsu.edu](mailto:alan.soldofsky@sjsu.edu)

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Alan Soldofsky

## Awakening

Awakened by mocking birds  
calling in the stale August light,  
sky the color of tallow,  
she goes to the sink.

Sleep crusting her eyes, crumbs  
of mascara under blue slits, hair brittle—  
not a person to become she thinks.  
No one she can recognize

glaring back from the dull sheen  
of the mirror. With her fingertips  
she smooths the lattice of creases at her temple,  
puckers her lips, making a face—half sneer

half kiss—as she rubs her cheeks  
with the washrag she keeps out  
for guests. No one to say anything  
about this, about the extra weight

that's settled around her knees,  
her sore feet. She puts her tongue  
between her teeth, the roof of her mouth,  
like sour honey. The taste of a story

she once read aloud of the girl  
lost in a forest. Darkness descending.  
No shelter. Who knew to say her name  
backwards three times, to wrap her head

in her arms so she would be kept  
from danger. Now she is the one  
who devours children, who'll someday be pushed  
into the oven. A picture on the wall

over her shoulder. A portrait of snow,  
she with her tribe of angels. How she's tried  
to re-inhabit that radiance. The house  
quiet now, porous as skin.

A husk of perfume still lingering  
in the bedroom. A remnant of sweetness  
mingled with the brine of bed sheets.  
And air smoldering in empty rooms.

usual ripped jeans and skintight tank top for dress slacks and a real blouse and what had sent her on her way to interview with Frank McIntyre who'd promised to help the girl out. She must have forgotten all that, so swept away that she accepted a job for which she had no experience and that couldn't last more than a week or two. We tell ourselves, well, that's Lindsay, always diving in without a thought—*that artistic inclination of hers*—but any of us might have done the same, seeing the place the first time; any of us could have accepted the painting job just as easily, and found ourselves, not unwillingly, transforming that putty brown storefront into a doorway to the tropics.

But at that point we hadn't been inside yet. We were subjected first to an explosion of turquoise and bright yellow trim. The blue of the Caribbean, a yellow that stunned the eyes. Creole colors, Maxine called them. Enough to cause two wrecks at the corner of Holter and Main alone. Enough to induce Fannie Pearson, when she came out of the Hallmark store across the street, into labor two months early. Enough that the Winterburn's herd scattered back into higher meadows, not ready for such heat. Lilacs burst into bloom before their leaves. Whole flocks of geese passed us up, keeping north.

Understand we are not a summer people. We do not amble down the street, sit on porches, or talk with a lilt. This color scheme was outrageous. Dangerous, we knew, even then. These were colors meant for a place where people slept afternoons, danced on sangria into the night, and celebrated Shrove Tuesday with much more than a pancake dinner at the church community center. These colors were not for people for whom summer began as a lukewarm thaw and ended in blazes and smoke.

And yet, despite our decent upbringing, regardless of our misgivings, the gaucheness of that storefront enticed us. We found ourselves making unnecessary detours through town, taking after-dinner strolls to watch the colors spread, marking how the blue stretched like a canvas of sea, the yellow, bright strips of dawn sand. And even though we knew it was the unforgiving Montana light that beat the ruddy brown into her shoulders, that streaked her dreading hair gold and freckled her face, Lindsay Hammond, standing on her ladder, brush in hand, herself grew tropical before our eyes. A girl of islands. Coconuts could have fallen at her feet or hula girls swished by, and none of us, Lindsay included, would have blinked. When we spoke to her, she turned her bronzed face at us and smiled a secret smile, as if we spoke a language she no longer knew.

Perhaps if it had been anyone but Lindsay, we would have been more worried. With another daughter of the town, we might have sensed the pull of loss. We might have tried to grasp at her, keep her from descending the bank toward those waters.

And maybe we expected too much from Guppy. He was, after all, not only her best friend—he was in love with her. He had been, everyone knew, since fourth grade. So he was waifish; some might even say delicate; he was still loyal. So he displayed