

Classic Poetry Series

Mark Hillringhouse
- poems -

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Woolworth's

for Greg Fallon

A kid yells "Mother Fucker" out the school bus window.
I don't think anyone notices the afternoon clouds turning pink along the horizon,
sunlight dripping down the stone facades,
the ancient names of old stores fading like the last century
above the street, above the Spandex women who adjust their prize buttocks,
sweating in the sun as I wonder how this city that has no more memory of itself
than a river has of rain, survives.

Is it just a matter of time, or that peasant woman
who tugs my sleeve demanding "peseta" from every passing stranger:

I can still smell the hotdog counter and the pretzel carousel.
I loved the sound of birds as I entered, the watery bubbles
from aquarium filters over by the plants.
If I imagined like a child walking with my mother,
the store part rainforest, and closed my eyes
I was in some tropical country:
that feathered blue against the orange of forgotten sunsets
after the rain-washed streets erased the footprints
of tired mothers who waited in line
under the red and gold transom
to cash their welfare checks.

And maybe we're all feeling the same rage,
seeing the up-turned fish tanks stacked against the parakeet cages,
sunlight catching on the twisted wire between the shabbiness
of an emptied storefront, rays of sunlight poking in
to finger the dusty hollowness of barren shelves.
Or maybe it's the cheap Plexiglas above the Chinese lettering
or the sound of car alarms and sirens blaring us back.
The city dead in me swaying down these aisles,
like everything else that fell from my life.

I walk down Main Street
trying to regain my balance
behind the men who walk home
from sweaty jobs with clenched fists

and the women who follow them
pulling their children
like dogs in the rain.

Anonymous submission.

Mark Hillringhouse