

LEVI BOLLINGER

Sestina for Finn

I ain't agoing to tell all that happened—it would make me sick again
if I was to do that. I wisht I hadn't ever come ashore that night, to
see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them—lots of times I
dream about them.

—from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Under thumping Apaches circling the blinding sun,
our convoy grinds past the simmering checkpoint, and curves
into a city of uncertain hate. We float an asphalt river
dirt-choked and barren, adrift with lives forfeit, forgotten:
yet it's the same, Jim, as when with sliding oars in humid moonlight,
we slipped into that blood-warm current, mud clinging

as hot gore between our toes while our fevered minds clung
to dreams of languid freedoms beneath a placid sun—
catfish dreams untouched by the brilliance of light.
Land was smothering when Water took you to its curves—
black-skinned as you were—in drifting current hate forgotten,
shimmering and hushed beneath untamed stars of that river.

Again I find myself adrift, adream on some such river;
here in brazen stares and alleys—where flashing death may cling
to every flapping plastic bag or bloated roadkill carcass—here I forget
the ravings of my whiskey-reeking father: I his teenage son
shrieking in Satan-terror, knowing his Bowie's curve
sought to carve my heaving ribs, drag unseen lungs to light.

But in this current, in my hands, where weapon and death rest light
as a fingertip, the scabs and blisters of my death-choked river
carry flotsam of release—from father yes, but too from curves
of glistening jasmine hips to which I, adoring, clung.
But then she crumbled, found another, tore our unborn son
from birth, from life, from all but pain—then dropped us: dead, forgotten.

So to the lurking ambush in the dunes, I float to forget.
Overpasses dripping grenades as tears are a wild light
I loathe to leave. Past the blasts concealed by sun-
crackled blocks, I watch and drift—on my asphalt river
of death, whose parched stream bathes my clinging
hate in blood. For I have known the feud in these curves,

fixed my aim on guts of others, squeezed the metal curve—
hoping for a splash of blood, a crumpled body to forget.
Or maybe hoping for no such splash, praying just to cling
to breath once more, once more to mourn the light
that finds my red-rocked eyes in need of such a river.
Look at me, Jim, here beneath the pulsing choppers' sun:

you see I need these curves of death to lend me light.
I see in you another river, a stream of life that brings forgetting,
a hope as glassy as the sea. It clings to you. Speak to me of that sun.

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