

in between an unknowing place

by Michael J. Pagan



“. . . the corner was hot. Thought of
the one halogen me, my momma, my sister
all shared in our living room,
with the broken dial—lighting up
our whole world. The sun sucking off
the sidewalks. They called it humidity.
We called it the corner—breathing.

Fruit man panhandling with
a sign: *fresco, limpio*, but in all
caps. Resting on a street rail. A
penny waiting for a train to beat
him down. Pinching my nuts. I
had to piss. Hungry as any definition.

Everyone said I had the face
of a pork shoulder; residue on
the pan (cast iron, not the non-
stick joints). Always caught up.
A cicatrix for the beaten, and
the pavement.

Dracula sitting on the lid of
the cooler next to me, selling
cans of Jupiña and the small bottles
of Malta Goya, spitting: *I'm thirsty,*
nigga. It's fuckin' hot like Africa.

Street light reminding me of my eyes—
colorblind—unable to ever tell
what it was trying to say. Lucky
there were only three. Top-middle-
bottom. Never forgot what
the top meant: all stops.

There was an old woman chopping
a coconut with a machete while
watching a crowd. Animated
phantoms overlooking a dead
mother. She spoke of how she didn't
understand the difference between
a laughing joke and a smiling
joke. Spoke about the difference
between un-land and no-land.

That heat-cloud-off-the-pavement
smell. Ten years ago. What the
fuck did she know? I had a bruise
at the bottom of my right foot.

Dracula two cars down; palm
on a girl's shoulder. He ignored
the woman, much older, on the driver's
side. *Drac, the light's about to change;*
face sunk-in. Dracula looked out
at me through the windshield. Face
next to her cheek, choking
the air. I remembered all that was
left of her was an earring stud
hiding underneath my comforter.
A screwback.

A little girl hugging an empty tin
bucket, waiting for the rain. A
ghetto rock. Awake and
asleep. Wishing she were
like an Anise seed instead . . .”