

Alison Luterman - At the Corner Store

He was a new old man behind the counter, skinny, brown and eager.
He greeted me like a long-lost daughter,
as if we both came from the same world,
someplace warmer and more gracious than this cold city.
I was thirsty and alone. Sick at heart, grief-soiled
and his face lit up as if I were his prodigal daughter returning,
coming back to the freezer bins in front of the register
which were still and always filled
with the same old Cable Car ice cream sandwiches and cheap frozen greens.
Back to the knobs of beef and packages of hotdogs,
these familiar shelves strung with potato chips and corn chips,
Stacked – up beer boxes and immortal Jim Beam.
I lumbered to the case and bought my precious bottled water
and he returned my change, beaming
as if I were the bright new buds on the just-bursting-open cherry trees,
as if I were everything beautiful struggling to grow,
and he was blessing me as he handed me my dime
over the counter and the plastic tub of red licorice whips.
This old man who didn't speak English
beamed out love to me in the iron week after my mother's death
so that when I emerged from his store
my whole cock-eyed life -
what a beautiful failure ! -
glowed gold like a sunset after rain.
Frustrated city dogs were yelping in their yards,
mad with passion behind their chain-link fences,
and in the driveway of a peeling-paint house
A woman and a girl danced to contagious reggae.
Praise Allah! Jah! The Buddha! Kwan Yin,
Jesus, Mary, and even jealous old Jehovah!
For eyes, hands, of the divine, everywhere.