

Leaving

by Claudia Kisielewicz

He sits underneath the canopy of the community bus stop on the intersection of Sample Road and Turtle Creek Drive. It is bright, but low-lying clouds to the west sag like pressure-cooked oatmeal.

The bus is running late, but he feels ok because he's listening to Miles Davis's *So What*. A month ago, he would never think he would be listening to this. But now he needs jazz. It keeps him from reliving the sirens and that look on her face when she saw the blood. Jazz keeps him from thinking about the air bags that jutted like angel fists and knocked him into a world of white. He blasts the volume to save himself. He sits alone and waits, submitting to Davis's driving beat.

A young woman carrying grocery bags tramps to the bus stop. She is trailed by five-year-old twin boys, whining with hunger. They assemble on the green, perforated bench, and the woman produces a cereal box from one of her bags.

"No more fighting if you want to see Daddy."

She checks her phone, running her hand through her unwashed hair. In his periphery, he watches the twins tussle over the box of Fruit Loops, their fingers getting caught by their lips as they push the pieces through their little fish mouths. Excess cereal falls through the holes in the bench and rolls near his feet.

With nothing else to do, he props his elbows on his knees and leans forward to appreciate the contours of his newest Jordan kicks. Then he stares at people's profiles through their car windows as they sit imprisoned by red lights on the road in front of him. When the woman's phone rings, he steals a glance as she gets up. He watches her boots crush the Fruit Loops. Cradling the phone to her ear, her face crumbles into rage.

"Where the hell are you?"

She paces back and forth along the curb with her free hand on her hip, unaware of the sudden falling rain.

"But you promised me you would take them with you for the weekend!"

Her eyes remain trained on the traffic. Her twins are identical except one has a burgundy bruise on the side of his neck, and it reminds him of watercolor roses he once painted for his mom. The boy turns to face him.

"Hey you! Putchya hands up! You are unda arrest, mista."

The boy threatens with his hands that he has coupled to form a saliva-infused gun.

"If you don't, we will have to fightya."

His eyebrows rise in protest.

"You de bad guy."

"Me? But I'm not evil."

He chuckles. The child with the bruise stands on the bench and begins hitting him on the bicep, rattling the CD player in his lap till it falls on the ground and rips the earplugs out of his ears.

"Don't let him get away."

He blocks the punches with one arm and tries to fend the child off.

“Alright, you two win, I surrender.”

The boys chortle in triumph. Suddenly, one of them starts taking off his shoe.

“Hey! Chill out, buddy.”

The shoelaces are now unraveled as the boy looks up, sharing his smile with a front gap.

“Look at these cool supahero shoes!” he shouts to his partner.

Feeling embarrassed to be overtaken by a pair of tots, he looks around to see if she had seen them. She hasn't. She is trying to balance on the edge of the curb but her left foot lands in the runoff that rushes to the gutter. Her other arm rises in protest.

“So what?! You can't just leave, they're yours too...”

The bus arrives and she twists around to return to the canopied bench.

“No... You're not leaving us!”

He tries to get up, but the twins have encircled him on both sides, their little white hands interlocking tightly around his waist.