

Field Trip to the Museum of Human History

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Everyone had been talking about the new exhibit,
recently unearthed artifacts from a time

no living hands remember. What twelve year old
doesn't love a good scary story? Doesn't thrill

at rumors of her own darkness whispering
from the canyon? We shuffled in the dim light

and gaped at the secrets buried
in clay, reborn as warning signs:

a "nightstick," so called for its use
in extinguishing the lights in one's eyes.

A machine used for scanning fingerprints
like cattle ears, grain shipments. We shuddered,

shoved our fingers in our pockets, acted tough.

Pretended not to listen as the guide said,

*Ancient American society was built on competition
and maintained through domination and control.*

*In place of modern-day accountability practices,
the institution known as "police" kept order*

using intimidation, punishment, and force.

We pressed our noses to the glass,

strained to imagine strangers running into our homes,
pointing guns in our faces because we'd hoarded

too much of the wrong kind of property.

Jadera asked something about redistribution

and the guide spoke of safes, evidence rooms,
more profit. Marian asked about raiding the rich,
and the guide said, *In America, there were no greater
protections from police than wealth and whiteness.*

Finally, Zaki asked what we were all wondering:
But what if you didn't want to?

and the walls snickered and said, *steel,
padlock, stripsearch, hardstop.*

Dry-mouthed, we came upon a contraption
of chain and bolt, an ancient torture instrument
the guide called "handcuffs." We stared
at the diagrams and almost felt the cold metal
licking our wrists, almost tasted dirt,
almost heard the siren and slammed door,
the cold-blooded click of the cocked-back pistol,
and our palms were slick with some old recognition,
as if in some forgotten dream we did live this way,
in submission, in fear, assuming positions
of power were earned, or at least carved in steel,
that they couldn't be torn down like musty curtains,
an old house cleared of its dust and obsolete artifacts.
We threw open the doors to the museum,
shedding its nightmares on the marble steps,
and bounded into the sun, toward the school buses
or toward home, or the forests, or the fields,
or wherever our good legs could roam.