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Jamaican Diver

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MONICA HOPKINS

Jamaican Diver

He stands quietly, 
at the rear of the glass-bottom boat, balancing 
himself without the aid of a staff to steady him 
as the waves rock me to sickness.

In port, like a tourist 
I peer over the boat's edge 
to catch a glimpse of the tropical fish, I'm afraid 
to swim with and lose my sunglasses 
unexpectedly 
one hand anchoring myself to the boat, 
the other extends to the water, 
outstretched fingers frantically 
try to make contact 
but fall short 
as my glasses drift to the sandy bed 
thirty feet below where we are anchored.

He comes to my aid, after 
a half-joking request for 
a diver to retrieve 
my lost bit of property.

As he peels of his shirt, and 
fits himself with a mask, 
I catch a glimpse of fear in his 
eyes before nervously inhaling 
as much air 
as his lungs would permit. 
I watch him plunge into the glassy water 
with the urgency and importance 
of a man diving for pearls, thinking 
he may not ever resurface.

I wait in awe of his gesture 
of hospitality and concern 
and think that I do not know any 
American boys who would 
go to such lengths
for sunglasses,
or even for me.
Instead they'd pull out
the credit card or checkbook
and offer to buy me a new pair.

Such is the American way.

With thankfulness I finally see his figure
grow before me as he makes his
ascent back to the boat.
Gasping for breath,
wet with saltwater
he climbs over the ledge
grasping my twelve dollar sunglasses
in his hands
holding them up like a prize. He returns
them to me with a smile
not wanted anything
in payment except to regain his lost breath
and a moment's rest.

* * *

I remember the water dripping from his
shoulder length dread locks
and dark skin the color of truffles.
I can still see his eyes, white like pearls
dark like onyx, and his
shorts saturated with salt water, clinging to
his muscular legs.

Yet, in spite of his great kindness,
as much as I pick my brain
I cannot recall his name.

Such is the American way.