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NON-CUSTODIAL

At the nadir of the year we wait, their father and I. August five months past, we count the weeks until their June return. We trust that like migratory birds they will recognize their second home if not by scent or instinct, then by the boyish detritus they've left behind:

a pair of small black socks, folded and forgotten in the corner, growing dull and grey with dust;

the river bank quartz collection lined up on the windowsill to catch the meager January light;

two stray Legos, a lone K’nex wheel and a rainbow-striped bouncy ball settled in book shelf corners.

These are rare artifacts in the museum of last summer. (drawings tacked to the walls are cryptic interpretive panels)

These we do not disturb: this our silent agreement. These do not count in the tally of household clutter to be cleared away. These let us convince ourselves they’ve just gone out for a short while to a friend’s house, to soccer practice— they’ll be back before dark.

Our curation lets us believe that one will remember the reason for his hand-made envelope on the wall and the other will still be entranced by the clouded translucence of quartz.
THE WOMEN LIE ALWAYS IN REPOSE
in and out of the Ortiz Gurdíán Museum, Leon, Nicaragua

1. La Magdalena Penitente—studio of Guido Reni

A seventeenth-century Mary reclines upon
the shadow of foreground stone. Banished far
from her village (quaint in the sun-showered distance)
this Mary had the audacity to choose
not to bear the appellation la Virgen

but Magdalene. Unclean! cry the terrified priests.
Our Mary clutches death and offers forth
her thighs, soft muslin draped between their cleft,
while locks of unrestrained improper red
caress and frame her curiously spherical breasts.

Her face, though, she refuses to give. Her eyes
she keeps well hid, upturned to gaze at two
putrid cherubs. Her painter can preserve
his faith, call her penitent, keep ignorant
of her lasting pride, her un-regretful scorn.

2. Sin Título—Ramiro Lacayo Deshón

Around the corner
and past four centuries
an anonymous model
lies back into undefined space
and lets herself fade behind

the abstraction of
turbulent brush strokes. She
is not made flesh but of lines
too thin to hold a woman’s weight,
too bright—violet, crimson, green—
to cast a woman’s
   soft shadows, too profuse
   for clarity. Through the thorn-field of this harsh geometry
   the anonymous woman

juts her musky curves
   forward, thwarting painter’s camouflage. But herself she
keeps. Her expression she conceals.
   Head thrown back she allows her
thoughts to be obscured.

3. Parque Central

In the high midday swelter women sit
upon broken and peeling park benches,
their toes, ankles, calves, even their knees
and plump brown thighs allowed to glisten,
to be caressed by sunrays and passing gazes.
Above this, only shade can touch
their skin, to keep beads of sweat from forming
on manicured brows, and slowly running
down to reveal the raw canvas beneath
the scene they’ve painted on themselves.

I have no proper landscape on my cheeks.
My white, unshaven thighs don’t glisten.

Still, I scan the park for an empty bench,
and assume my place with the women in repose.