

Inheritance

How many generations of mothers
have been forced to sell memories
to pay the rent?

It is possible to recover
from selling one's history.

And it is true, one room
can be home to read,
to write, to rest and fight
for more.

Hopefully, children will
someday understand
their true inheritance.

And then the bitter taste of loss
will be eased with the knowledge
of the true value
of a working woman's life.

—Lonnie Nelson

Inside my Grandma's Mojo Bag

(Surely you know what that is)
There's a lock of my hair
And another of my brother's
There's a smooth black stone he's had since he was a little boy
It's magic you understand - he told me so himself
And there's some dirt from "back home" - fine dirt -
That kind of smells good after it's rained on
There's a hair comb, hand-carved, and made of ivory that belonged
to his
mama
There's a silver ring he made from a coin, it was grandma's
There's my daddy's medal, rubbed smooth over the years.
And a poem my mama wrote
Inside my Grandma's Mojo Bag
There's a sorrow and a happiness
A prayer
A song
A hope for tomorrow
There's rest and peace and a reckoning with the past
There's a little boy who became an old man
And an old man who remained a little boy

—Steven Hooker

The Wall at Stockman's Yard (Chicago, Illinois)

Railcars fattened for the slaughter
Shrill whistles and burst of steam violate the night
There is no stillness
Snow falls

Grimy old men wearing bandanas, yellow-stained
and faded
And shoes with no laces
And plaid pants
And dirty white socks

Coins tossed against a wall blackened more
by soot than design
No flowers or flags here
No pictures
No names precisely chiseled
Oh no! Not there

For these, the standing fallen, spray paint
record all too well
And they, huddled about burning ash cans
Try in vain to warm that place which
cannot be reached

—Steven Hooker

America

in America you are not
required to offer food
to the hungry, or shelter
to the homeless, or to visit
the lonely - in fact, one
of the nicest things about
living in America is that
you really don't have to
do anything for anybody