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The Mechanic

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Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters is an international literary journal dedicated to publishing works encompassing, but not limited to, the Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. The Journal is especially dedicated to presenting the arts and letters of those communities that have long been under-represented within the creative discourse of the region, among them: Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles, Maroon societies, and the Asian and Amerindian societies of the region. Calabash has a strong visual arts component.

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Colin Robinson

THE MECHANIC

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Long strokes,
He urges, between breaths,
Gently guides my touch
Along his rigid spine.
All the way down.
Down, my fingers think,
Clambering over the dense tufts where
His legs separate:
With a splash;
His muscles rise
Naked in the tub,
Push against my yearning
Sponge.
We both blink
Ourselves back from
This daily brink.

His grease has crawled up under
My raveled fingernails:
He comes here each day,
After hours of work,
Fingering engines to life
In the shed next door,
Sits in the tub;
Tells stories of his wife
And three children back in Carriacou,
The two sons here,
The goats.

He would smile
Whenever he caught me staring
At him from the house.
You does like to watch me work?
He asks last May –
Our first words in a year;
In silence polishes the fender he had
Straightened that morning,
The oversize blue overalls
Sliding back and forth

Over each contour of his unclothed body.
Long strokes,
He winks at me,
Sharing the secret to the gleaming shine.
Suddenly he turns toward me;
My eyes, still locked
On the troubling movement in his trousers,
Dart quickly upwards.
Sheepishly he clasps his hand
Over his loose, hardening dick,
Eye to eye, grins:
You see I need to pee real bad.
I open the door,
Silently shepherd him into the narrow hallway,
My flank brushes
His blue surface.

He opens the door wide,
Stands over the bowl,
Raising his voice over his noisy stream:
It doh even have a standpipe in de shed.
He offers a wet hand in thanks,
Stumbles for language,
Fumbling in an inner pocket for
An immigration form and an old Bic.
Is so much books you have...
You does like to read...
Hesitates, releases the thought:
You could help me write something?
He makes some halting letters on the page,
Staring into my eyes for guidance,
Pauses;
My left hand, like a child, grasps
The leathery back of his
To form in cursive: I pledge.
Long strokes,
I smile up at him,
Tonight come back
And clean up;
We can finish then
– my betrothal.

The rest is ritual:
Every day he comes,
Just once,
Without knocking;
I notice the sound of his

Frothing piss,
The faucet running,
The moan of his torso against the hot water,
The scrub brush struggling
Through the coarse hair on his chest.

Hearing me stir,
He talks loudly
Through the always ajar doorway –
Some story about home
– Or people from home here.
I enter, without knocking,
To listen,
Sit on the unflushed bowl;
Lazily pick up the sponge:
You back still black.
He shudders:
Long strokes;
Lies in the blackened water,
Eyes closed;
Will not move,
Waiting
Until I reach down
Below his waist –
He rises with a splash:
Without words,
Dries, dresses,
Wraps his arms around me,
Calls me son,
While his overgrown fingers stuff a dollar
All the way into my front pocket,
Slip a quarter in my back,
Scraping his stubbled chin
Against my forehead.

Pulling them out with sweaty palms,
I protest.
Use it for soap,
He insists,
Squeezing all the air out of me.