

Michael Fischer / *Natural Bridge*, No. 29, Spring 2013

The Good Kids on Treat Day (Excerpt)

In The Canteen & Games Room on Treat Day for Good Kids, The Lipstick Lady yelled at us with our tongues hanging out red, us the yellow brick children's ward kids come to buy half-price Sno-Cones for excellent behavior that week. It was me, Twitch, Royce, Moose, Tamandra, and wrist-scarred Cecilia, who a few days later would run away and be murdered by her grown man boyfriend.

"I want a blue tongue," Twitch said from back of the line.

Jeffers, our healthcare tech chaperon, was up front.

"Me too," Moose said.

"They only have red," Tamandra said. "Y'all know that by now."

"Blue's better," I said. "For days it glows."

"Red ain't shit," Royce said. "I want blue up on my tongue! Give me that blue!"

"I wish they had Klondikes," Cecilia said.

"Them are too fancy," Twitch said.

"If y'all don't shush," Jeffers said, "We'll leave," so we shushed and were grateful for any color on our tongues hanging out.

"Now get your money right," Jeffers said to us about the state allowance in our pocket envelopes.

"I might could get a Dixie Dog too," Twitch said. "With gobs of chili!"

"You'll spend all your money," Tamandra said.

“Dirty Dan makes a good dog!” Twitch said, and Tamandra rolled her eyes.

“I wish they had Klondikes,” Cecilia said.

The Canteen & Games Room was in the adult ward basement before it closed like the rest of the rundown hospital will in a few weeks, us the last few remaining patients on the children’s ward before the closing—me, Twitch, Royce, and Moose—since Tamandra and the rest of the kids have been discharged to parents or half-willing relatives, or transferred to raggedy group or foster homes, like us will be too.

And sometimes, us four sit up in the children’s ward, boys day room and remember places and people disappeared and dead, because it’s easier to see our future when we see our past. For now, we only know our state-assigned fates, but we can learn to remember what’s disappeared, like The Canteen & Games Room, where once was a Dixie Dog and Sno-Cone concessions stand, wobbly green cafeteria tables with folding metal chairs, shuffleboard, a missing-men foosball machine, a rickety-rack bumper pool table, and the famous, mildewed Jungle Safari Putting Green with fake rocks, a fountain that didn’t spout, and a giant, plastic elephant with a hole in its foot for the giraffe-skin golf ball.

Subscribe to *Natural Bridge*: <http://blogs.umsl.edu/naturalbridge/subscribe/>