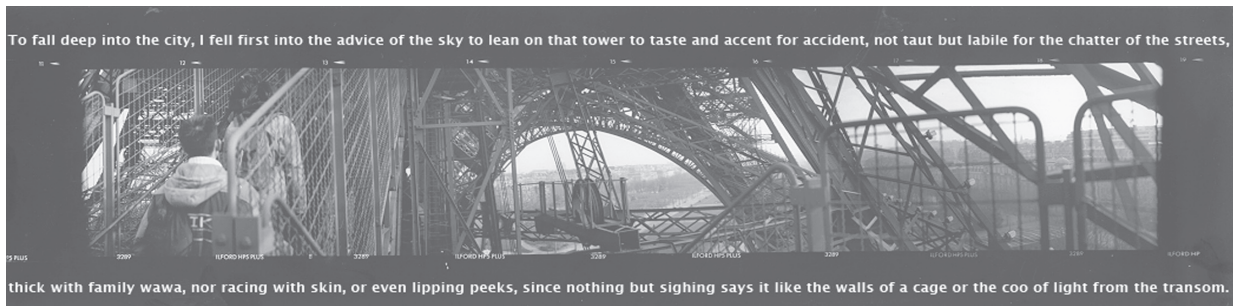


ACCENT



ERIC JERVAISE

FRED WAH

ACCIDENT

In front of a black limousine, a white man with layers of winter khaki and Shetland tweed lays on the street, his face kissing the ground, arms folded back and hands pushing against the ground where he tried to catch himself. The left side of his face is soft and milk fed. His glasses are oval and gold. He has been struck by the car, which is blocking traffic in front of him. Seeing him prone, stopped mid-step, and now stuck on his face like a rat snapped in a trap, is why the brown boy stops.

Just as he is about to whisk off to the Towne House bar in a taxi, the brown boy does not expect to see so close a version of his white man, dead in the street. The brown boy was thinking how he always gets cabs in the city. What helps is the brown boy's freshly charged Banana Republic blue denim suit and red gingham shirt, half shrouded by a Wilke Rodriguez black wax cloth pea coat. Perhaps it is because he had to buy the shirt and suit to get in the dining room at Paulio's. Perhaps it is because the staff was pleasant to him after he returned with this suit on and his other clothes in a shopping bag. Perhaps it is because his lover will pay for the suit. Perhaps it is because his heart raced as he dismissed his old outfit, left it in the dressing room, and chose whatever he wanted from the racks. Perhaps it is because, before he saw the dead man, he was thinking about asking his lover to pay for his new clothes. Perhaps it is because this was implied as he raced from the restaurant, out into the street after a new suit, which he would buy on credit. After all, he

would never choose to go to such an empty and decadent restaurant, where they simply made his fish taste like red meat after a heavy coating of duck oil and a too generous lump of foie gras. Perhaps it is because he can't control his lover's friend's taste who dined with them, that she is from the Midwest and nice and chose Paulio's. Perhaps it is because when the bill came, the brown boy flashed a smile and said: I spent all my money on this suit.

Though what the brown boy can control is the way he curves his hips out to the road and wiggles his fingers, the whole of him becoming an innocent and available brown object, an amorphous being that leers out, sexily, into the flat and black threat of being passed.

As the white man kisses the street, the brown boy falls in love. It is this simple: the car-struck man in the street looks like his lover, save the struck man's tuft of long brown hair that floats onto the street. This is why he stays. He is in love and moved by the plain golden glasses that are still attached to his face, the well-conditioned skin, the beard shaven down to tiny soft holes he can see in the street light. When the ambulance comes and he is turned over, on three, by the paramedics, who make him wiggle his fingers and talk, the brown boy thinks his spine is snapped. That he's in for it for the rest of his life. The brown boy knows he cannot go anywhere, and must wait there to watch. He must wait to see the gut exposed as they turn him over on his back, hope they cut open the tight sea of white shirt to expose his stomach, cut his pants open, show his leg, underwear or cock. He must see to it that they return his scarf to the struck man's body, that they lay it on his leg after they clamp down his neck before he is lifted and lets out a groan to let the brown boy know he is, at least, alive.

RONALDO V. WILSON