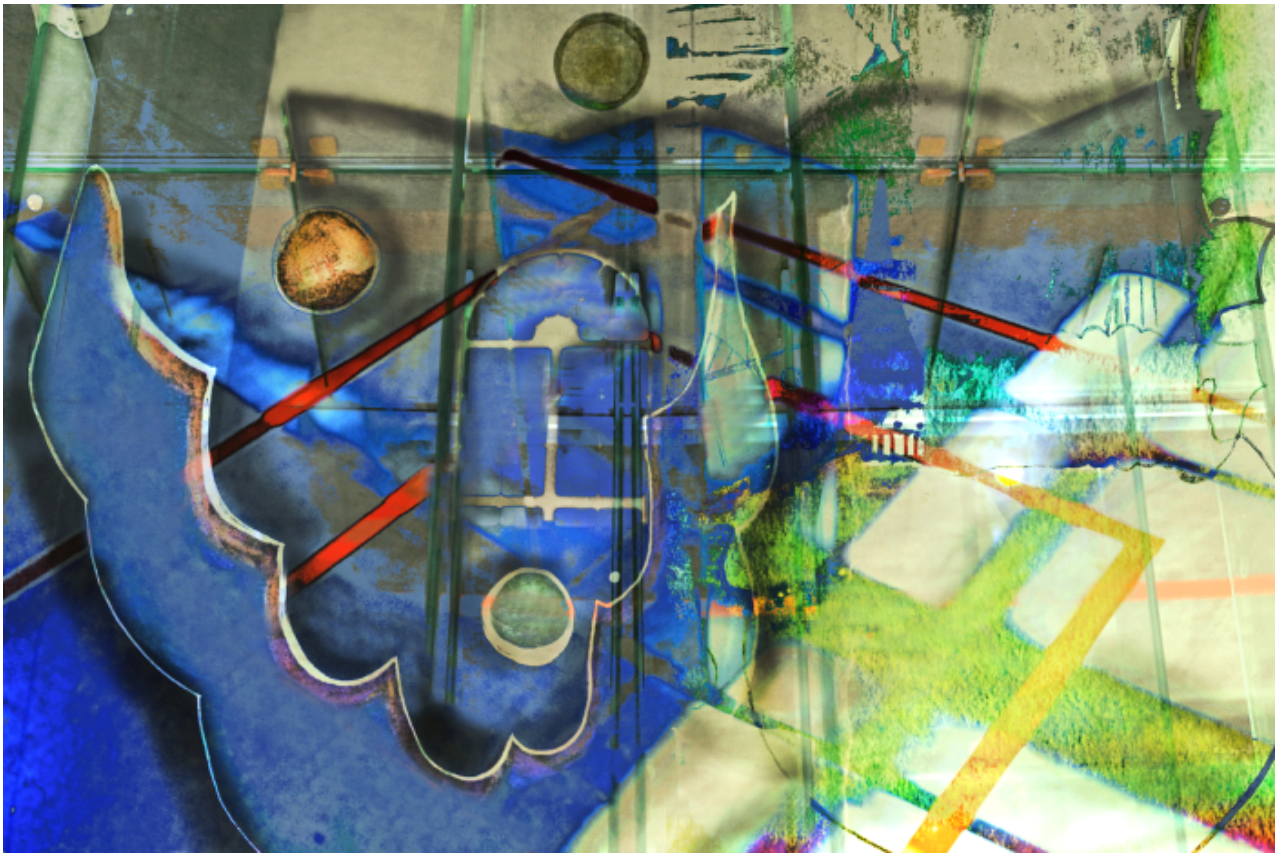
FLASH FICTION

Dazed

by Christian Lesmes



"Window that Dreams" by Anna Smetanenko

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“What does this Eel eat?” I asked, watching it swim around a white bucket. “Bananas,” said the owner of the processing plant.

The long, shiny body turned its head towards me, opening a dark place in the room.

The heat was relentless; I found myself on a bus along the Caribbean coast, listening to a Vallenato song that made me think about the past.

Amarte más, no pude

To my left, I could see the plantations passing by: the vast lands filled with rows of banana plants, their bright blue sacks hanging from stems and leaves.

The bus stopped briefly to allow two men with a large crate of dark avocados to board. They wore faded sweatsuits, oversized green T-shirts, and a cap that matched their grey work boots. Their outfits were intense sun and jungle debris, like oil paintings with too much turpentine. Well-kept, hand-woven grey *Mochilas* hung from their shoulders — a place where a paper swan could perish, white and unblemished. Both men had long, thick hair and strong, work-shaped hands.

I saw them struggling to balance while walking towards the driver to pay. Their hair swayed side to side, and they could barely steady their feet — the yellow-green-blue of passing plantations reflected in their eyes. I wondered if the repeating landscape gave them vertigo. One tried to dig through the coins in his pocket, but the engraved numbers were water droplets on metal: trickling without falling, flirting in the sun.

“We get off at Gate Two,” one of them mumbled.

There was a shared sense of grief on the bus — a mutual understanding of how people here got ill while working in the plantations. Everyone else thanked God for their mixed heritage and 9-to-5 jobs, even though avocados were scarce and dry there.

The Eel continued to circle. “120 kph, 160, 180, close to the speed of light!” said the man. “Faster!” I watched the colours swirl together, a continuous green and brown ring with white

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plastic.

The ring shrank until it became untenably small.

Dazed, the Eel swallowed itself until the spark of life faded away, and the water was calm; our faces reflected in it.

“Unexpected,” said the man.

“But here, I have another one. Come with me; I’ll teach you how to use the electric shock.”

I told the driver I’d get off at the next stop.

I walked a muddy path along the river, to its mouth (the sea).

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