POETRY

I Learned to Walk in Thrifted Clothes

by Frieda Temper



"Pirate" by Jeff Mann

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I

I learned to walk in
thrifted clothes,
my cousin's jeans and
worn plimsolls.
I learned to
ride the bike
at age four or five
not knowing the
difference between
my cousin's new bike
and his old one
which I called mine.
It worked for me,
but I am wondering
if it worked better
for my cousin.

II

I'm eavesdropping on a
phone call. My
tiny ears can hear so well
though my brain
can't piece together what
Mama is trying to tell
a colleague
about my beloved
neighborhood, my home
which Mama now calls
a worker's district.
I cannot make sense of this —
my home being made for work
or why I am five
and unemployed.

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III

I'm twenty-two and
I've developed a dislike for
polished leather shoes
and grey men
who raise their eyebrows
at my working class background.
I'm not at all
accustomed to wearing
black leather shoes
and I can feel them
crushing me
when my professor
finds out about my former school
and his eyebrows tell me
This place is not for you.
That's when his black leather shoes
crack and their seams become loose
and I ask him:
Who do you think will fix your shoes?

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