**Coffee Girls**

Sarah Kartalia

 She’ll understand that it’s not an amusement park, that there’s no gawking like at beaches where the point is to show *le maximum* while covering *le minimum*. At this beach, where people are stripped of cloth, stripped of nylon and Lycra, they are also stripped of social masks. Lilly au naturel…*oui, elle va s’adapter*. I take in the color swatch of every skin tone and raw, vulnerable human. Tight, flappy, lanky. Canyon wrinkles. Built-in flesh floaties. Depressed asses that used to be al dente. Hershey-bar abs. Romano bean or wine cork dick, pierced clit with gold hoops clinking, breasts like baseballs or latkes or mole hills or rice sacks. Skin smooth as worm or sheepdog shaggy. All beauty, no shame. Nobody looks at anyone in this Instagram-hostile habitat.

 *Nobody looks at anyone,* but I cannot peel my eyes off the coffee girls. Mesmerized by their twinness, their espresso skin and their blindness, I also watch the mother, as large and creamy as the girls are spindly and chocolate, sitting in the sand, Giza-like. She doesn’t escort them, fuss, question. She lets them be, and they are.

 Like Hindu goddesses, it seems they have several limbs each that slap and grope and flutter on the honey-blushed sand. Half a twin slithers down to the water’s edge on her tummy, her fingers digging, oozing into the softening sand, her hamburger roll buns petite and perky and smeared with sand. She hears the low tide wave announce itself and she lays her face flat to receive the salt wash, twisting her head back afterwards to thank the sun. She licks her lips. The other twin is raking the sand with her fingers as her supple snake body scrubs its way east.

 Sand in ear curls, sand baked into patches of hair, sand eye shadow, sand knee patches, sand Chapstick, sand on all the little piggies: not a grain gets touched or brushed off or itched.

 Then the smiles when the girls find each other again, arms swinging and sweeping the beach in uncontrollable control. At their first touch—five fingers catching and clinging to make ten, their teeth are sugar cubes dropped into roasted arabica. In their joy, sandy noses rub, followed by steamed milk squeals.

 It’s human and mythological, the slinking and sliding. There’s absolutely nothing jerky. The slow and steady artful sand dance flows smooth like syrup because this edge of the shore is their element; the open sea contains them and sets them free.

 I think about Lilly.

 We might not be sand mermaids, but we are roasted and rich and hybrid. If we went blind, and someone were to drop us off at opposite ends of this beach, we would find each other as quickly as these clove-colored sisters. To creep along the coast, my belly scraping the way, lugging my decades, feeling my nipples chafed by the time I smelled her mellow fragrance. *C’est toi*? Maybe I’d say it in French. *C’est moi*! She’d answer with a jubilant howl, and we’d glide clumsily to each other until she pulled me to her ripe, soothing skin blanket. Yes, to have no view, just nose. The brewed sharpness and zing, her curves, her frothy pillows. A feast for sure, a demitasse of soul.