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How I Learned to Climb Trees

Benjamín Naka-Hasebe Kingsley

from the language of the Onondaga Nation in outer Appalachia

Hode'noda. "Sing!" Say it out loud. Don't leave
 our Res(ervations) behind or you'll die. Burnt paper skin,
 the hocking sound at the back of his throat, they say
 he ate like a wolf and slept like a bear. Scullery
 of ribcage rising in the open air. I have done everything
 but speak my own name, slurping on hands and knees
 at the lip of white bucket in the room's bulging middle.
 Outside, purple blossoms call to me. I think I want to strip
 them like a shish kabob, let their meaty hearts bleed
 across the three-leaf clover of my tongue. I rattle
 broken deer antlers like drumsticks. I've skinned
 frogs. I've been a real bastard. It's like
 when he let me rub the divot, our
 elbows entwined, so I'd be infested with the same
 family of chiggers. So we could be koda. Brothers.
 Be blessed by the red welts itching through
 the tanned hide of our arm in arm. So a sometimefather
 would pry into my wounds

Ben Kingsley is best known for his Academy Award winning role as Mahatma Gandhi. A touch less famous, BENJAMÍN NAKA-HASEBE KINGSLEY has not acted since a third-grade debut as the undertaker in *Music Man*. He is the 22nd Tickner Writing Fellow and has received a fellowship from the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center as well as scholarships from Kundiman, Sewanee, the *Tin House* Writer's Workshop, and Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundation. He belongs to the Onondaga Nation of Indigenous Americans in New York. In 2017, his work will be featured in *Apex*, the *Iowa Review*, *Narrative*, *Ninth Letter*, *PANK*, *PEN America*, the *Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Sugar House*, & *Water-Stone Review*, among others.

with the slender coals of tweezer blades, squeezing
the heads of burrowed insects from my flesh. So
I could feel fingerprints seal closed the openess.
When my arm falls asleep at night, I think of koda. Brother. The alien
appendage attached to my corpse, making itself knowable.
Dream chiggers wake, alive, and skitter through the upper mantle
of my arm. Do we wake in rhythm? Does he dream of me
with a sideways mouth, poured from a cup of slender nose? I've heard
of how I used to stand in front of closed doors, calling his
name as if in a dream he was just beyond and I can hear
his necklace of rattling beads, smell the bonfire burning
of his armpits. I learned to walk in my sleep they say. I learned
to talk in my dreams. If I step through a door, I want to know
I will not fall through tree branches, to the forest floor.
Where they found him. I must have seen him, bent over
that ancient log, he with an unzipped consciousness. Spilled. How old
was I? Three. Singing for the first time deeper and deeper
into the forest: do la mi do la mi. I'd lost
my voice by the time they found me