

Them Dogs

It was red dust when we filed off the bus and dispersed into the marketplace. You wore flip-flops and said the snakeskin boots I bought in Santa Teresa were *execrable*. That was your word. *Execrable*. The red sand below as red as the red sand above, you followed me across the marketplace and down the stairs to the awkward shapeless lot where glistening young men stood and stinking old ones sat swaying in a cloud of smoke that smelled like hand-rolled cigarettes greased with sweetened petroleum jelly but what we found wasn't the authentic *chiles rellenos* we were looking for. You were nervous and I was nervous because you being nervous was unexpected and even though you still don't believe me, the truth is that the dog fight we watched in a silence that can only be described as reverent was also unexpected. Their blood was heavy black strokes in the red sand and them dogs didn't look like the dogs we had at home. When it was over and one dog lay still in a curdled black puddle with a belly that didn't look quite full enough anymore, you would not or could not but in any case you did not look away. You said *there's something wrong with them* and I didn't know if you meant the dogs or the people and I would not or could not but in any case I did not ask. There was something wrong. There was.

James Phillips