

Living in the La Brea Tar Pits · Nancy Lee Couto

Each morning she is wheeled into the picture window of her son-in-law's house, jammed into her selected viewing space by the table with the lamp and bowling trophy. The drapes sweep apart like fronds.

She stretches her neck like a brontosaurus and watches the neighbors, whose names she doesn't remember. Across the street two Volkswagens line up like M&M's, one yellow, one orange.

At lunchtime her daughter broils a small steak, very tender, saying, "Ma, you *must* have meat." But her taste runs these days to Kellogg's corn flakes and baby cereals. She leans over her plate, stretching her neck like a brontosaurus, and mangles a small piece between her tough gums. The dog waits his turn.

Her grandson has left a bag of M&M's on the table. Forbidden, but no one's watching and they're so good, one yellow, one orange.

Each evening she is wheeled up close to the TV in her son-in-law's house. She watches *Superman* reruns. In the kitchen, her son-in-law eats meat and potatoes and talks in a loud voice. His bowling night—she will have her daughter to herself. But the TV picture has gone bad, and the room is dark. Just last week she could hardly tell if there were four lovely Lennon sisters, or three.

He returns late—almost eleven—
low scorer on his team. He needs his wife
but there's a dinosaur in his living room, stretching
her neck. It's past her bedtime. He waits his turn.

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Each morning he looks out of the picture
window of his house. Across the street
the neighbors have parked their shiny, new Toyotas.
He blinks, as if at something unexpected
and obscene. He moves away,
walking upright, heavy on his bare
heels. He wears pajamas.

In the kitchen
he pours orange juice into a paper cup
and takes his medication—two shiny capsules.
His mother-in-law is extinct, and his wife, too.

There is the dog to feed; and he will think of
people to visit. He moves slow, deliberate,
but keeps on moving. The sky is full of birds,
and the Rocky Mountains all have names.

In the evening he turns on the TV
and wedges his fifty-foot frame into his favorite
chair, curling his tail over the armrest.
He watches the third rerun of the Italian
version of *Zorro*. When the horizontal
hold goes haywire, he watches diagonal stripes.

It's not easy to be a tyrannosaurus.
He stands eighteen feet tall, he thuds through life,
what's left. And when he roars, he shows his sharp
stalactites and stalagmites. His grown children
get nervous. He resents them. They wait their turn.