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Photography: Memorial Fountain, Hall of State, Victoria Hall

Katherine Robertson

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POEM ABOUT PENNIES

Michael Raffaele

Featured Poet

I'm sitting by a fountain and
All that catches my eye are the pennies at the bottom-
The lonely copper men rusting away in a clean chlorine world-
Dated dreamed faces wavering in institutional waters.

And I want to reach down and grab these men and save them-
Dry them off in my clothes and take them home
And tell them they're going to live again for candy or video games or sissy's girl scout fund.

But I am one of them and I can't save what I am.

I'm rusted and I taste so bitter now-
And I've been taught that pennies are just homeless faces on the sidewalk
That few stop to pick up and shine and have meaning for.
They are no longer dreams but
Fraction faces stacked giving the world all it needs-



PHOTOGRAPHY Katherine Robertson

Only to be left wherever the dead can be left.
And then the others go on with their lives and here I am sobbing-
And I want to look up and tell these people that
Wishing wells are made with the tears of men they toss inside them-
That the heavens of the earth are the oceans that hold up the lands they walk on-
To stop teaching children to wish for themselves at the expense of the little men.
The still faces with no voices born at the bottom of our own static lint pocketed leftovers.

And I look up at this world with the eyes of 1982 and see all the shoppers and students and travelers-
Sitting down on the stairs gracing their fingers smooth and silk over the glass of my grave,

Over to my left is a face of 1951 looking no older than I-
Telling me of the days when he was worth a cigarette and bottle of pop at the general store-
Before he grew old and was forced into corporate hands that gave him away to a son
That threw him in here during a Christmas shopping spree.

Then there's the young faces who tried to buy books the way their fathers used to but came up far short.
And now they have nowhere else to go.
So they lay here and wait for the day when the rushing waters of man will
Eat away their ridged eyes and they no longer have to look up at a passing world
That gave them life and then took away all of its meaning.

Those of us who remember the days when we sat under the arc and had trust in God-
With sweet Liberty standing behind us and our birth year a right of passage leading in front of us-
When we were the ones of many but still were able to sit up tall and squint to a hand reaching out.

And for every big green Washington arrogant face whose value gets posted in every corner of the world
There are ninety-nine of us rusting copper faces holding him up and we're the reason for his glory.
Yet the pennies rot away in the fountains of every mall and school
And corporate square in the mighty dollar's land.

Ones of many dying for the ones of few.

And I walk away from the lit up fancy fountain knowing
I'm just a penny-
Failing to keep my head above water-
Anchored to the bottom of some world by the weight of a memorial on my back-
Wondering why the dollars are all up there
And I'm down here.

