

VACATION

By Angela Jackson-Brown

Sometimes I checked out
I would literally sign the tab
say thank you for the room
and then I would leave.

I'd rush past the bellman
crashing out of the hotel room
running blindly towards the lobby
dragging behind me luggage crammed with dark secrets
and hidden shames.

And I wasn't checking out to go to a better place.
I went on no extended vacations to exotic locations. I
retreated to back wooded areas—places undiscovered
by human eyes. I built shelter out of kudzu.

I unpacked my luggage and draped myself
in all of the pain it contained. Then I waited
giving the kudzu time to wrap itself around
me until I was a mummified mess. Until
I was so far gone that the screams of my son
sounded like whispers. He'd yell: *Mommy where are you?*

I wanted to answer but I didn't know how. There
were no maps to where I was and even if
there were, I didn't want him to come and
see me there. So at times I'd manage to weakly call
back to him: *Don't worry. Mommy will be back.*

I made it seem like we were playing an elaborate game
of hide and seek. I made him believe that Mommy's
condition was normal. It was Halloween and I
was in disguise. *Shhhhh. Let's be quiet and the
Voices won't be able to find us.* He'd play the
game until he'd get tired. *Mommy come back.*

And for him, I would drag myself back.
I'd repack the sadness the bitterness and the shame
back into the suitcases and then I'd unravel the
ropes of kudzu that clung to me like an Anaconda ready to
suck my very life away. Tired and exhausted
I would gather my boy in my arms. *It's okay,* I'd say.
I'm back. Mommy is back.