

His eyes started watering now. The drip stung his throat. He sniffled, went with it, took his dirty handkerchief out of his back pocket again, wiped his tears, bowed his head.

“Okay, Robbie. Sorry. I’m sorry. I’m all worked up. I’m worried, y’know. What are we gonna do?”

“I told you, honey, we’re gonna be all right. We got some money left, enough to buy some clothes for the kids, some food. The kids are starting school. They get the damn free breakfast and free lunches, don’t they? We’ll buy snacks and stuff for dinner. I’ll get a couple of them blow-up mattresses for you and the kids in the meantime. I can sleep on the floor. I’ll go downtown tomorrow morning, work all weekend doing day labor. Make a few extra dollars for us. We’ll be all right, promise.”

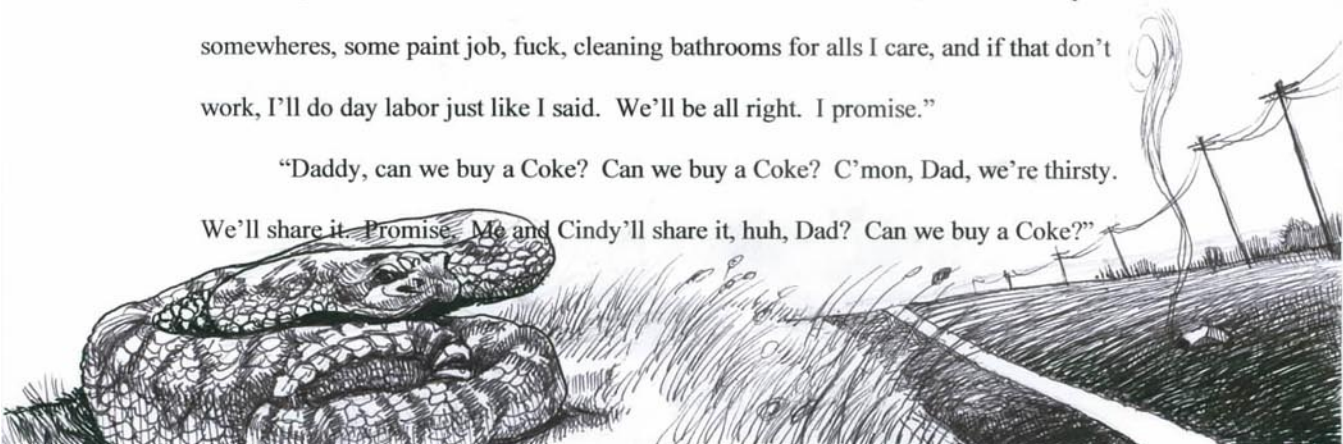
They heard the kids yelling, turned towards the field.

“What’s going on over there,” he yelled, “You two get yourselves over here right away. You hear me?”

The kids came running towards them.

“I promise, Meagan. Believe me, we’re gonna be all right. I can feel it. This is just a temporary thing, a temporary setback. I’m going back into the store right now and calling my dad’s friend, you know, Mr. Ramirez, and I’m gonna ask him if he ain’t got something I can do to make a few extra bucks on the side tomorrow, some clean-up somewheres, some paint job, fuck, cleaning bathrooms for alls I care, and if that don’t work, I’ll do day labor just like I said. We’ll be all right. I promise.”

“Daddy, can we buy a Coke? Can we buy a Coke? C’mon, Dad, we’re thirsty. We’ll share it. Promise. Me and Cindy’ll share it, huh, Dad? Can we buy a Coke?”



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After the flood waters had receded, after the carnival people had had a chance to replace the carousel's twinkling light bulbs that had short-circuited and popped, after the giant, surrealistic portrait of the two-headed baby had been taken down, she walked back into her cardboard shanty-town house by the river to dredge the mud out of her two small rooms and see what was left.

She screamed.

The two-headed baby, still in its giant mayonnaise jar, was half buried in the muddy floor. A sadness, dark, heavy, and wet, made her heart feel like the mud under her feet. She stared for a long time at the glass jar, tilted on its side in the mud, a ray of sunlight reflecting off the rounded top.

"Those barbarian Gringos," she said softly in Spanish, knowing about the reward in the Mexican newspaper. She wiped the mud from the heavy glass jar with the hem of her old, black skirt, and cradled the jar awkwardly in her arms.

She placed the baby on the rusty folding bed she and her children shared with her husband, a drunk who worked in the oil fields of Veracruz, and only came home once a year at Christmas. She was up to her ankles in mud--a big, bamboo tree trunk had gotten jammed in her door, a bright pink plastic grocery bag caught on one end.

She rolled up her sleeves, pulled up her skirt, and tucked it in at the waist, and began clearing the mud off the square of house bricks that formed their hearth so she could light a fire to dry the place out. As she scraped the last bits of mud from the top of

