In 2013, a study by the University of Cape Town found that more than one-third of women in South Africa bleach their skin because they want to have ‘white skin.’ Nigerians are the biggest users of bleaching agents, with 77% of women using the products on a regular basis. Skin bleaching has been linked to skin and blood cancers as well as an increase in burns, and skin damage.

About 7.8 million women and 1.9 million men use tanning beds. Although the numbers have been decreasing overall, there is a 177% increase in tanning among men between ages 40 to 49 and a 71% increase in usage among men 50 and up. Indoor tanning increases the risk of melanoma up to 75%.

“You have pretty eyes. They look almost like amber.”

Nearly half of all Asians have an epicanthal fold, a skin fold of the upper eyelid that covers the inner corner of their eyes. East Asian Blepharoplasty, or eyelid surgery, reshapes the skin around the eye with incisions and sutures to create a defined crease on the upper lid, or a ‘double-lid’ common in Western people. This cosmetic surgery is one of the most popular Asian cosmetic surgeries in America and the most common surgery in Korea.

“Do you just use mascara?”

“So are you just getting fat or what?”

“I’m sure you two would make a good match; he likes personality more than looks.”

“You just need to eat healthier.”

“You used to have such a cute little dip in your sides...”

“Your hair looks so stupid did you cut it with a fucking razor or something?”

“You just need to lose a few pounds.”

“You have more of a coke figure.”

“You should wear nail polish more, you’d look nicer.”

In the world of an eight-year-old boy
in East Texas
in Burlington, population eight
seasons are marked by time of day not year.

Ben Fox is repairing a tractor in his shop
a rusted weathered farm implement
that stands on the dirt floor soaked in sweat and motor oil
that stands under the tin roof soaked in morning sun
that stands surrounded by wooden beams and shiplap.

In the morning season,
beside my grandmother’s home.

Rubin Fox works in his store tending the coke box
a vat of frigid water holding cola bottles
that stands on the oak floor painted with tobacco juice
that stands in the noon-time air smelling of bubble gum and kerosene
that stands in view of the towering gas-pumps filled with ethyl.

In the heat of the day,
beside my grandmother’s home.

Mondo and Chico are playing in the yard
two brown sons of migrant farm workers
they shape play-things with clever hands rough as brown cinder blocks
they speak a language that I don’t understand
they seek out fireflies to hold in a clear glass jar.

As we play in the last hours of daylight,
beside my Grandmother’s house.

Aunt Mo smiles as she looks out from her porch
an angel with large arms that remind me of wings
arms that hold everything with care

(Continued)
Arms that can dispatch a chicken for our dinner
Arms that protect and guide an eight-year-old boy.
In the evening moonlight,
beside my Grandmother’s house.

In East Texas, in Burlington, population eight.

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I do not want a country
where residing in prison
is more permanent than a home,

nor a country
where minorities are easier to hose down
than wildfires

I do not want a country
where bodies are as disposable
as plastic bottles, piling up
in urban streets

I do not want a country
where getting richer
is the only means
of getting ahead

I do not want a country
where shortcuts are taken
for big corporations,
leaving destitute lives forsaken.

I want a new country
where we won’t have to be reminded
that anyone’s lives matter.

I want a new country
where headlines of black names
are for the Nobel Peace Prize,
not about the irreversible death toll rise.

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Seasons of the Day

I WANT A COUNTRY

Natalie France