This Shame Called Joy

Amy Uyematsu

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AMY UYEMATSU

—for Thylias Moss

Hand squeezed,
thick with a pulp which clings
to this cup as I tilt it
slowly toward my mouth,
savoring the flesh, sweet
skin against skin—
orange juice.

But I need more assurance
for such small, deliberate joys.
I can’t stop seeing
the tape of young Latasha Harlins
being shot in the back over a $1.79
carton of orange juice.
The grocer who kills Latasha
doesn’t go to jail and I
can’t convince anyone of the crime.
Or of my own outrage.

My senses grow darker each day.
This lust I cultivate for the ordinary,
the juice of an orange tasting more exquisite
than I ever remember,
cannot be separated from the brutal
death of a child who only wanted
to drink from the same fruit.

I need to acknowledge
my longing and hold joy on my tongue,
this desperate, glorious hunger
to take the whole world in—
even in its meanness—
for whatever it's willing to give.
Let me be grateful for
the tenacity of my desire.