

## Gullah Words

I liked real words,  
Craved them really,  
Wanted, and desired them,  
As if they were morsels of rich oysters  
Roasting on the rusted piece of old tin  
Lying right on the fire out by the work tables  
Where we cleaned fish  
And worked on cars  
And hung the gutted carcasses  
Of hogs and deer.

In the long evenings there  
I watched the new fire burn,  
Oak, and pine fatwood,  
Inky black smoke,  
Silent,  
Smoke as thick as water  
Seeping everywhere  
And pouring up and over the oysters  
That the old men raked  
All over the tin.

From that silence the words  
I learned to love,  
The only words I trusted,  
Were those full of Gullah smoke and black gutterals,  
Turning and twisting in the evenings  
like snakes sliding up live oak trees.  
I never knew which limb  
Their heads might appear around next.

The oysters rested voiceless on the fire  
Until saltwater sizzled gradually from their shells,  
Their whispers now ready for utterance.

I learned to crave words,  
True words, real words,

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That can only be borne in silence,  
So that I might have someone  
To share them with.

*Sam Candler*