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Carol Hamilton

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All the Players

by Carol Hamilton

Braiding corn rows on the beach,
the island women fetch attention,
live by their flying fingers.
Some sway with ripe fruit
on their heads while the men
hawk straw hats.
It all seems lazy, lush.
At night the coins are counted,
tomorrow is calculated.

West of Chihuahua,
the Tatumara women climbed
into the truck with us,
their baskets dangling,
their cave home left behind,
to rise with us to the best vantage
for a view of the hazy purple canyon, gash
in earth still open to the west.
They set up shop for us
who took them there.

In Morelia the mothers urge
the children to comb the tables
in the plaza once more
to sell their tiny packets of Chicklets. Some
hang back, teary,
but in the end, they come.
We wave them away.

This morning my world is gray,
and rainbow colors dance
in the fringed ecstasy of the windsock.
I think of the bright places,
know that at this very hour a child
south of me slices a cucumber,
salts it, hopes to sell the taste of summer
to someone willing to carry off
all of life's hardball pitches in a cup.
We hand over a few coins
to keep the game going.

I have a big jar of pennies.
It sits high on a shelf in the closet.
I have never counted them.

