

This is flesh and bone

this is not a ghost story or  
one of puppets without strings  
that haunt the corridors  
of vacant minds,

what once was skin and jawbone,  
now rattle in descendants,  
hearing them shake the chains  
of past rainstorms, raising  
the goosebumps on their young.

no, this is not a ghost story  
there is no furniture passed down  
to move across the room,  
no estate left in a will to fall into disrepair,

only the blood of the past  
remains in the veins, through the heart  
of those who go on.

this is the flesh seen beyond  
the photograph that spirits lingering in

This is what once was  
lost in the waves of the past—  
coming back from beneath  
the tide like shells washed a shore  
left empty for new memories.

### Malaga Story Time

Once upon an island in Maine,  
 The people of Malaga were  
 Subjected to the racist pseudoscience  
 Of greedy Politicians that turned their  
 fishing community into a  
 dark empty place  
 full of Maine's secrets.

The black, Scottish, Irish, Yankees, and  
 Portuguese  
 of this Victorian time Vacationland  
 couldn't escape the heat of many newspapers  
 headlines  
 describing them as a shameful disgrace.  
 And their tar paper shacks and life of  
 hardscrabble  
 Lobster traps and shell beaches  
 became moral indignation.

Then,  
 the talk of the Malago  
 went far beyond casual bigotry,  
 The Islanders were accused of incest,  
 feeble-mindedness and passing  
 On inferior genes.  
 Fanning the newspaper's flamed accounts  
 and bolstering the Eugenics movements  
 watchful eye.

Finally,  
 In the summer of 1912  
 Picturesque Maine gave the last  
 stern ultimatum to leave or be burnt down  
 with your homes. The government  
 removed all the graves and mainland  
 communities used "Malago,"  
 as a way to talk about the mixed-skinned  
 people that were evicted or those associated  
 with living side by side with them.

### Bath Enterprise Headlines March 1, 1902

A population of 35, and 26 of them

Sick with Measles  
No Food,  
No Beds,  
No Fuel and Scant Shelter

All Winter Long Ignorance,  
Shiftlessness, Filth, and Heathenism

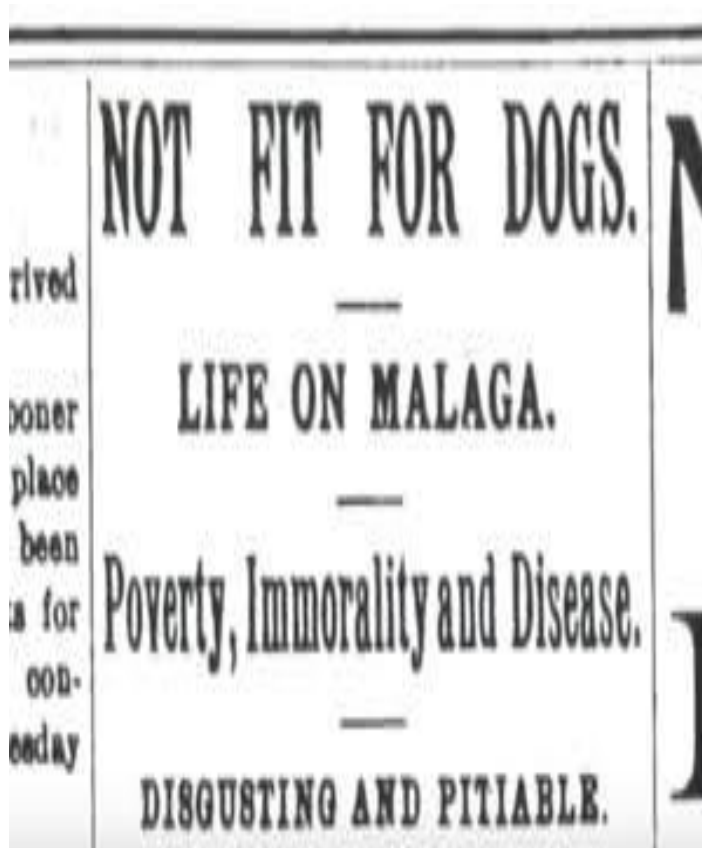
A Shameful Disgrace that  
Should Be Looked After at Once  
The Town of Phippsburg Disowns  
These Creatures and  
They Are Made Outcasts.”

### Circa 1905

Malaga Island is  
declared  
ward of the state; to

navigate the  
choppy  
water to this,

“No Man’s Land,”  
watch for cloudburst  
of the pauper fund,  
on the non-voting,  
tax-free community.



## The people

The people  
I come from

those, cast out  
from their piece  
of floating land.

Like lobsters pulled  
out of their shells  
or clams shucked  
and left on the sand.

They swallowed  
their histories  
to starve the theories  
that they were  
a weaker race.

They held them  
stories under  
their tongues  
till the truth  
it could rain in my veins.

A steady torrent  
of questions  
to the past,  
the puddles left  
after the storm.  
That splash in black  
on pages.



## The Captain's House



Malaga Island students outside the McKinney house, circa 1905

Photo courtesy of Peter Roberts

The girls' hair was done up all the same, in a braided pompadour to frame their faces, no smiles, no light in their eyes. Each holds their lessons; each holds their expression. Boys' hair is combed down behind their ears--Empty-handed, or hat in hand, without paper or a plan. A smile swallowed or held in the cheek standing on the wooden planked deck. Some shoeless (are their splinters in your soles?) Inside the schoolhouse the Captain opens the windows and reads his paper. This show, is to show the scholars all lined up, six in a row. To show that light-brown to dark-skinned can be taught to know the 3Rs and etiquette, shoeless or combed. Inside the schoolhouse, the Captain opens the windows and reads his paper.

Circa 1909

A lifter  
of the fog,  
teacher,  
Evelyn Woodman  
taught  
the 3R's,  
etiquette, and morals

in a little red  
Schoolhouse  
that was  
founded in  
the pocket  
of the storm

on a hill  
where children:  
Sadie, Lizzie, Lottie, Eta, Abbie  
Stella, Harold, Johnny  
colored and white,  
learned to  
read and write.

Post Card: Tray of Spades

Lowered heads but not the eyes  
for strangers come to tell white lies  
degrading their lives.

The small one peeks,  
tiny eyes meet the watcher from  
behind the fence.

In a pen for eyes to behold,  
six peering back revealing the soul  
of the old and the young  
holding the frame.

Shamed three are the sideshow,  
with dark skin and nappy tresses,  
untamed at play in dirty dresses.

They do well to hold their tongues  
but their eyes whispered truths  
to say:

outside the sapling fence  
the ones that don't belong stand  
outside the frame.





### Family Group Malaga Island

My Gram displays the once-living  
in monotone gloss on her dining room wall,  
Light brown, dark brown skin turned to a dull  
gray  
in the black and white photo.

Four Malagaites with slits across their lips,  
and their history in their mouths, awaiting the  
flash.

Gram says they labeled this photo wrong.  
It is not their father,  
more like a play uncle  
standing with his chest out,  
fists tight on hips,

freezing this moment in time  
until he can go back  
to patching the roofs and mending the fences  
to keep out cold  
and keep in hope.

The two male children, Gram said, are my great  
uncle Len,  
and great-grandfather Harold posturing like they  
have marbles  
in their cheeks, Uncle Len the bigger one seated  
with a dark suit  
jacket and no shirt or shoes on, right pant legs  
rolled up,  
leaning against the front door.

The small one with the long-sleeved  
white button-down shirt and thin suspenders  
is my shoeless six-year-old great-grandfather,  
just a boy balanced with one foot on the stone  
step  
as his gaze searches beyond the photographer.

And the Husky woman to the left, Gram said, is  
somebody's momma,  
snuggling the long-haired black cat atop her  
tattered apron.

The newspaper from 1902 that Gram showed me  
says  
that this was not even considered living –  
That their life wasn't an existence "fit for dogs."

Still the one-room house on the water's edge  
promised freedom and warmth  
where clothes on the line waved a salty hello and  
goodbye,  
where small gardens were tended, and the dusky  
clay was swept  
from dirt floors.  
Their handmade fences stood sturdy and proud  
like knuckles, ready for the fight,  
as if one hand behind their backs  
could take on a state  
and its communities of hate  
behind their picket fences  
on the other side of the water.

They are poised, waiting for the light  
to press against the negative,  
imprisoning their silhouettes, making a "good  
show"  
of how tough they are, carrying their survival  
beneath their waist belts.

Did they know this moment would  
be matted, enlarged, and studied  
questioned for its evidence of a people within a  
frame,  
of their ability to unshackle hatred?

With their home in the background  
as it would forever be,  
swept into the scenery  
of Maine's sad history.





## Uncle Lenny in the Newspaper

From beneath the other articles  
about the inhabitants of Malaga Island his  
face, the only life I see on the lacker wood;  
his skin, the folds in his cheeks  
and the tight squint he carries in  
in his antiquarian eyes.

He looks as if he is about to speak,  
lips curled into a smile made for words, but  
he doesn't speak, none of them do, they are  
just found motionless on pages.

What is said is not found in their voices,  
behind Uncle Lenny is a sign that reads:  
"Don't Bother The Black Dogs."

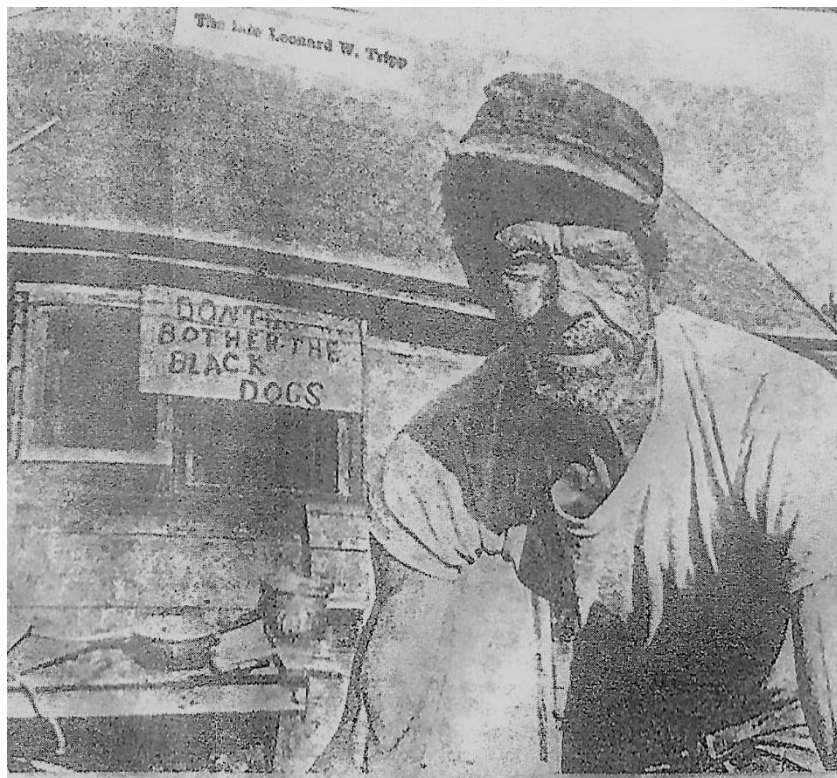
He is leaning into the camera his biceps  
showing from beneath his t-shirt rolled at the  
hem and his veins are firmly rounded roads  
up and down his arms.

His wrinkled face shows his age to be  
one of a worn season of the sun,  
scruffy beard and his nappy afro  
balancing his railroad cap,  
cockeyed to the right.

Articles from his childhood said  
that his life on Malaga wasn't fit  
for dogs.

Black Dogs shouldn't be bothered, nor leash  
or kenneled to quiet their bark.  
muzzling their history, chasing whole packs  
from their land and ultimately  
putting some to sleep.

He posed for the camera before on Malaga island  
as a young boy, looking into a camera that would  
not capture his future, he is still the same young boy  
that glared, and waited for the flash.



## Circa 1911

Governor Plaisted previously  
the Kennebunk sheriff rushed  
along furiously in the  
summer months to set the decree  
that Malagaites had one year  
to descend.

In December, the Marks family  
would be the first to leave,  
by way of the institution.

In the inclement weather during  
this storm system

all other families found cover,  
they moved or would've been  
moved, some paid  
meagerly for their homes.

Some homes and the school float to shore.  
Claps of thunder in the distance.  
All must seek shelter.

## the eviction

when you                    are asked to leave  
your home,        on “their land,”  
the wooden        box        windowed and shingled,  
which holds                    your things,  
  
becomes a chest                    of labeled memories,  
                  that you shuffle –  
from one                    corner                    of your mind  
                  to the next.

## Houseboat Life

I imagine her Grandmother, a red-headed, blue-eyed Irish, daughter of a fisherman who docked and pushed off the isle long before

Maine's government decided, spring of 1912 that blue and brown-eyes, pale and brown skins together

on Malaga, married or not were an eyesore – that they must hitch up or be burnt down.

The Portland newspaper decided, “They will be enjoying houseboat life.”

Great Grandpa Tripp fashioned a houseboat from fragmented remains of a home he once claimed.

Great Grandma made it water-ready like on their wedding day to weather any storm.

She tucked plates under bed frames. Tidied the boy's things and placed the stove on cement bricks. She tried to fight fever and illness with love's work.

Not 'til winter hit on Casco Bay did her chest finally cave in. The houseboat pulled to shore and the doctor fetched.

Not 'til Grampa Tripp returned with the doctor did the children leave grandma's dead pale blue eyes, her red flamed hair matted by the fever and wet with her children's tears.

Not 'til death kissed her brow still drenched from unfinished work did they decide that houseboat life was not for them.

