

CLERESTORY—  
JOURNAL  
OF  
THE  
ARTS

SPRING 17  
V56 N01

BROWN / RISD



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Sara  
Douglas

NOVEMBER  
8TH



We had been planning to watch together, the five of us under one roof. We hadn't set a time, and the three of us who had originated this plan had failed to mention it to the others, but we had decided that I should bring a sleeping bag so I wouldn't have to walk back from 2 Barnes after the results were announced sometime around ten. Somehow in the process of establishing that I could bring mine or Ajin's or just borrow Hugo's since it was already at the house, we wound up with enough sleeping bags for everyone and the evening took on, in my mind anyway, a backyard camping theme that seemed somehow appropriate. It would be dark and cold but the lightning would be only heat lightning and our mother would leave the porch lights on and the next night we would cook on a stove and drink out of glasses and sleep in our beds.

I had spent the weekend prior drawing eight human legs for my anatomy class. Our professor had encouraged us to draw from life but of course no one knew anyone with that kind of modeling time so he said we could draw from photos, "just fool me." So Ajin and I took iPhone photos of our legs and when she came home Monday night she looked at the drawing I was working on and said the gastrocnemius looked off, and she grabbed my hand and put it on her calf and said "Feel." I pressed a little and nodded and went back to

drawing but she said “no, like this, like you’re actually trying to spread the muscles,” and she grabbed my forearm and dug her thumb and forefingers into the flesh, and it didn’t actually hurt but I felt a little queasy as the parts of something I typically think of as solid began to separate into unfamiliar parts.

Also that weekend, someone at an unspecified location in China had logged into my iTunes account and spent the \$62.51 that remained of a \$100 gift card received with the purchase of a MacBook Pro during Apple’s 2013 Back to School promo. The emailed receipt for apps purchased included “Wrath of the Wings,” whose Mandarin iTunes description was Google-translated as “Wrath of the Devil HD- the strongest miracle hand tour the king back, to create a new world of blood mad war! Summer carnival, a number of themes sparkling fashion debut!” iTunes had given the app a rating of 9+ for “Infrequent/Mild Cartoon or Fantasy Violence;” top in-app purchases included “1. 680 drilling \$9.99, 2. 980 Drill \$14.99, 3. 6480 Drill \$99.99.” The promotional renderings featured two metal-plated giants, one blue and one red, looming over a platinum-haired white girl with feathery wings and a High Gothic bra. The buyer also purchased Qi Xiu live, described as “not just a professional anchor of the stage, as long as you want, gently launch point, the next one Jiang Yuner, the next one Liu Dumeng, the next one, The next Pony is you multi-magic beauty, show the most beautiful side... filters + beauty, you want to have more than the United States, the National Goddess of the eye in full swing.



狂暴之翼

3D炫战ARPG手游

立即下载



切换至竖屏观看

资

服

礼

3D炫战  
翼触即发

# zmtmA PP

't \*Pffi &:-P



Want to enter millions of years, you want to fans onlookers, as long as you want, in the phone side Qixiu Certification, income allows you to see vertigo, count to soft.” I caught myself wanting to know where in China the purchases had been made. A friend of mine once downloaded one of those apps that randomly matches you into a video conference with someone anywhere in the world, only to be paired with another RISD student several blocks away.

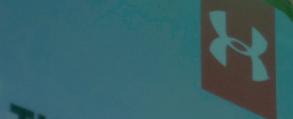
We never actually made it to 2 Barnes that night. Thirteen days into that month’s Verizon billing cycle I had received a message informing me that my hourly NY Times Upshot check had used up 90% of my data; by Tuesday morning I was checking every ten minutes despite Hillary’s having held steady for the past 48 hours at 86% Likely to Win. Still, at 3:30 pm, Hugo was texting me that he couldn’t think what to present on for celebrity week in Rhetorics of New Media; at 8:04 pm I was at the apartment taking photos of Ajin with a mandarin stuffed into each cheek, and we were picking out clothes for a photo shoot the next day, and we had settled on the fake fur pajamas and the rough pink wig and a dress with photo-printed sapphires and rubies and emeralds. And as the Likely to Win dial passed from morning through high noon, we swiped and refreshed until finally the night bloomed red beneath the glass of our phones, untouched by our swift fingers.





Jian  
Yu





THE DRIVE IS ON.  
THE WAIT IS OVER.







# Adam Shelby

CRADLE

Your zero-albedo anguish  
ancient & awful  
wholly yours | but minesome too.  
Here are reasons why.  
Nova interwoven thru your jugular,  
midnight foxtails brushing on your mind,  
the way your trachea hesitates b/c of  
your voice when you talk so warm b/cof  
what you want to say &bcf who  
you are

you are  
your voice when you talk so warm b/cof  
midnight foxtails brushing on your mind,  
Here are reasons why.

ancient and awful

Your zero-albedo anguish  
wholly yours | but minesome too.  
Nova interwoven thru your jugular,  
the way your trachea hesitates b/c of  
what you want to say &bcf who

midnight foxtails brushing on your mind,  
wholly yours | but minesome too.

the way your trachea hesitates &b/c of  
your voice when you talk so warm b/cof

Your zero-albedo anguish

Nova interwoven thru your jugular,  
what you want to say &bcf who  
are reasons why

Nova interwoven thru your jugular  
are reasons why your anguish  
wholly yours | but minesome too  
brushes midnight foxtails on your  
voice when you talk so warm &bcf  
your nova &bf your albedo

you shining thing  
you are reasons why

CRADLE

Your anguish  
wholly yours | minesome  
brushes midnight foxtails with  
voice which sweet so warm &bf  
albedo &bf starlight nova interwoven you

Your zero-albedo anguish – ancient and awful – wholly yours  
| but minesome too. Here are reasons why. Nova interwoven  
thru your jugular, midnight foxtails brushing on your mind,  
the way your trachea hesitates &bf of your voice when you  
talk so warm &bf what you want to say &f who you are your  
voice when you talk so warm &bf midnight foxtails brushing  
on your mind, Here are reasons why. ancient and awful Your  
zero-albedo anguish wholly yours | but minesome too. Nova  
interwoven thru your jugular, the way your trachea hesitates  
&f what you want to say &f who midnight foxtails brushing  
on your mind, wholly yours | but minesome too. the way  
your trachea hesitates &f your voice when you talk so warm  
& Your zero-albedo anguish Nova interwoven thru your  
jugular, what you want to say & who are reasons why Nova  
interwoven thru your jugular are reasons why your anguish  
wholly yours | but minesome too brushes midnight foxtails on  
your voice when you talk so warm & your nova & your albedo  
you shining thing you are reasons why Your anguish wholly  
yours | minesome brushes midnight foxtails with voice which  
sweet so warm & albedo & starlight nova interwoven you





Sasi  
Chanrvro-  
chana







Jessica  
Renzelman

W. T. WOODS BOSTON & NEW YORK  
C. H. COOK, CHICAGO  
J. L. MORSE, BOSTON  
J. R. DODGE, NEW YORK  
J. C. LEWIS, BOSTON  
J. M. COOPER, NEW YORK  
J. H. COOPER, BOSTON  
J. H. COOPER, NEW YORK  
J. H. COOPER, BOSTON

You must  
I can't

- 4 miles away from your home, everything so different.

This is what happened to the Jews when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took them captive & moved them to his land.

They instead of seeing the Temple that they had built and worshipped in, saw the Babylonians.

They saw it

Now and

+ Young Prophets Daniel was said to have been the side of Ezekiel in.



Babylonians  
Heathen

as Ezekiel

D. C. City of  
London, Baby  
of course

Entirely possible. Since God had His hand on both of them, that they knew each other.

Any way on the 5<sup>th</sup> year of his captivity, Ezekiel heard God voice

Verse 1 Chpt 1 Son of Man stand upon thy feet and I will speak unto thee.

Of course Ezekiel obeyed immediately but -

Anna  
Bonesteel

MATERIAL  
FACTS

The pure sweatshirt is black. It is black BECAUSE it is fuzzy, and it is fuzzy BECAUSE it is turned inside out. The smooth part is attached to the skin. At night, sleeping: the outside of bodies is Velcro and the outside world is going to be attached. And the outside world is going only to be attached to the outside of the inside out and stuff seeps in, basically, and becomes smooth against the skin (sift-sink of “rough” into such and such’s phagocytic membrane). I posit this with the anecdotal evidence of myself and one other, with a baseline understanding of the principles of endogenetic friction that incorporates something you might call a “quark”. It’s okay; yawn; HEADCRACK. I’m trying to wean my computer off of electricity lately. I give it a little bit less every day. I’ve been anti-lambasting about this syntactical oddity lately, where I turn the singles into plurals in spoken speech. A little elongation bursts into sawdust, runs down a glue sieve, or siphon, being in suspended, well it’s not glue, it’s held in the outside bodies, I give them a little bit less every day. I give the plurals a little bit more, just stick-er-on there. The devaluation of nouns is a product, though this is unintentional to be sure. Allegedly, it’s difficult to take care of a gecko. They are cold-blooded. It’s probably the same thing. What happens when you put a bowl that is not microwave safe into the microwave? What happens when you kiss me, and afterwards, seemingly in jest, invoke the sport

utility metaphor that one's tongue may lie in one's mouth "like a sandy pancake"? It's impossible to deduce if this is one's truly lived experience or something merely beautiful, interesting, as whatever, like a cross-pollination of groundy-words. I must say my dear ho, it is this very disruption, the breakdown of old habits and the rebuilding of new ones, that constitutes our feeling of being alive and in the world. You want a loaf of bread with moi? Gluten tag!, my dear ho. But what happens when you put a bowl that is not microwave safe in the microwave? Probably the same thing. Super'd the Bowl in the microwave in attempt to merge water and oat to make: oatmeals.

Okay, Watch. Does the bowl start to crack?

Does the power of words crack? I can shrug at the power of words to create micro waves cause I'm trying to wean my computer off of electricity. For this, I give it a little bit less every day.

Writing is the transaction where what I am able to do turns into what has been done, which wraps as a codon. The thing about writing is it takes up time AND space. If I were to query the object, pose the thing as a horizontal elongation of the table, whereupon the Kraft singles below may sit, they are, for example,

Actual object text, i.e. grilled  
cheeses, apples  
brown sweater on my back

Out of these, witness if you want, a diverse kind of set-up arraigned up there.



# Blair Johnston

ROOTS

My mother is undergoing the Return. It happens to some, they say. It's a statistical possibility, they say, as if that grounds her.

I have only told Rachel and The Doctor. The Doctor hates the term, the Return. When I said it, he jumped from his desk and hustled along the cramped office huffing phrases like "cultural ineptitude" and "Quercus transformare" for Mother's specific branch of the process.

When I told Rachel, she took my hand as always but said nothing. I can tell what she means when she holds my hand. If she squeezes it, she wants to leave because too many people are speaking too closely to her face. A graze, and she needs a kiss. A clutch, and she warns me the Problem is happening. We, as a joke, named it the Problem when she couldn't leave our bed for three mornings and I asked what's happening and she said I don't know, but it's a big problem. Sometimes I think Rachel lives for another world.

But this time, her hand said nothing.

My mother is almost done with the process. She stands, looming in the backyard, a few feet shy of the entrance to the woods. She is mostly bark now, but I can still see the outline of her face when I climb to the lowest branch. She no longer speaks.

\* \* \*

When it started, Mother and I thought maybe it was simply something with her skin. After all, Gran had always been prone to rashes. I sat with Mother on her plum couch, and she pulled back her sleeve to reveal the dark scales pushing through her forearm.

“It’s probably nothing,” I said, our usual lie. I pulled up pictures of skin conditions on my phone, and we analyzed. The next Monday, we even went to the dermatologist (before we knew to go to The Doctor), and she said “psoriasis!” and prescribed Mother ointment. Mother was relieved.

We both knew it was likely not psoriasis but we never suggested the Return. No one in our known family had Returned, and it was statistically unlikely. My friend Rudy, his father Returned, but he was part of only 0.0034 percent of the population that did. When Rudy told us, he wept and said it’s not fair, how could this happen, why my father. I rubbed his shoulder and said “such a shame,” but really, I was glad. Another Return could not happen to someone else I knew. This had to be it. The one time it would affect me, and only marginally. It was just improbably impossible.

Rachel was the one to suggest it. On a Saturday, we invited Mother over to our apartment for lunch. Mother wore a thick black coat despite the summer weather, and when Rachel tried to take it from her, Mother muffled, “that’s all right,” and perched at our kitchen counter. Later, when Mother tried to eat with gloved fingers clutching a shaking spoon, a leaf dropped into her bowl of soup. Under the table, Rachel held my hand.

That night, in our bed, Rachel said, “I’m sorry, Marie.” I knew then, what was happening to Mother. Rachel cried then, but this was not unusual. Rachel often cries. It is a part of the Problem, but I don’t mind. Sometimes I enjoy it. She cries when I wish I could. She cries when she feels too much, when she feels nothing at all.

The last time I cried I was twelve and a boy in my biology class laughed at my new haircut. He said I had “Lesbian Hair” and he laughed. I laughed too. I laughed for

the rest of the day and was laughing still when I climbed into the backseat of Mother's car after school. She asked, "What's so funny?" I started to sob. Mother stared at my image in the rearview mirror. Through hiccups, I told her what the boy had said. Her lips pursed and she said, "Marie, it's silly to cry over this. It was a silly thing for Mitchell to say. Of course you're not a lesbian. Stop this crying." And so I did.

The morning after Rachel's tears told me about the Return, I took my mother to The Doctor. The little man started stacking piles of paper on his desk and telling my mother his projected timeline for her "retracted mobility" and "height expansion." While he bobbed, I stared at my mother. She sat properly in the wooden chair, back straight, neck lifted, and she wore the hood to her winter coat and a red scarf wrapped around her face. I watched her eyes, which were the only parts of her still visible, waiting for the rush of pink or the quivering slosh. But they never came. She nodded briskly as The Doctor mentioned she had about a year until "final development."

The day Mother started Rooting, we thought she had fled town. I brought her another set of pamphlets ("Quercus Queries") from The Doctor, but she wasn't home. I called Terese from the pet clinic where Mother volunteered on Tuesdays, but he hadn't seen Mother in three Tuesdays.

Rachel picked me up, and we drove around searching for Mother. We drove by the library where she reads murder mysteries, by the sandwich place where she orders ham and lettuce on whole wheat, and by the park where she goes on strict ten-minute morning jogs. I called Rudy and told him to let me know if Mother contacted him. I hadn't told him about Mother's Return yet. He said, of course, that he would and to let him know if there was anything else he could do for me.

We were five minutes from our apartment when I realized it. I directed Rachel to the cabin by the woods on the southernmost edge of town. It was Gran's home, and Mother

put it on the market the day after Gran died on the back porch.

As we pulled into the dirt driveway, past the fading “For Sale By Owner” sign, I saw Mother’s coated figure in the backyard. She faced away from us, perfectly still, arched towards the woods. I wondered if she had seen an animal or if all of the meditation books Rachel had given her last Christmas finally resonated.

Rachel remained in the car, “to keep watch,” as I approached Mother through the stalking limbs of grass. Her red scarf was partly unhinged, flying loose around her head. As I stepped to face her, she did not look at me. She stared straight as if a taut string latched onto her pupil, forcing her gaze ahead. Cracked ridges peppered her face and stretched down into her neck beneath the coat’s edges.

“You can look at me,” I said, “it’s not that bad.” Again, a lie. She stretched her lips open, accompanied by a ripple of crunches.

“I’m sorry,” she croaked. “I only wanted to jog in the woods this morning, for a change. I didn’t realize.”

I knew then that she would not move again. The Rooting wasn’t supposed to happen for another two months, according to The Doctor’s timeline. I went to tell Rachel, but I found her dusting off the ledges of the front porch, a crumpled sale sign under her arm. I sat down on the top of the stairs, and she took me in her arms. “I just figured,” she said, “I just figured we should be close to her now.”

We live near Mother now, in the cabin. Rachel and I have developed a system. A weekly rotation of watering, checking for insects and rodents (Mother hates the squirrels), and branch arrangement. The Doctor told me to let any loose leaves fall on the ground to use for natural fertilization. I didn’t tell him that Mother would never let me use any other kind of fertilization.

On the last day that Mother could speak, she told Rachel to leave me. I didn’t hear the words, but through the kitchen window, I saw Rachel fling the garden hose against

Mother's trunk. When she came inside, Rachel said, "You might want to speak with your mother." I know when she's angry because she suggests I might do things. When I didn't want to leave Rudy's New Years party last year, she said I "might want to ask someone for a ride home." When I said her tattoo of a giant black square seemed pointless and intentionally confusing, she suggested that I "might want to expand my awareness and limit my judgment." As if she can curate my behavior with a soft push on the back, a mother's hand guiding her child out of a doorway.

Rachel screamed muffled, tear-stained phrases like "not enough" and "children" and "man" before shoving the door closed to our room, Gran's old bedroom. She usually lets me watch her cry.

I went outside, to hear Mother's words. I used the ladder to climb to her lowest branch so as to not puncture her skin on the way up.

"What did you say to Rachel," I accused. The scooped out indentations that stood for her eye shapes rustled, and Mother croaked, "Nothing. I just told her of the importance of family."

I remembered when I first told her Rachel was moving in with me, and how she didn't say anything for 28 seconds. And then she lifted her lips and said Rachel would be a "lovely addition" to our family.

"I just told her that maybe this isn't the right fit. You have to think about starting a family," Mother said, strained. "We have thought about it. In fact, we've done some research and—"

"No, don't you see? That's not right. It's not, it's not natural," Mother said, her limbs shaking, nearly knocking me off my branch.

She never said another word after that.

After my mom stopped speaking, I decided it was time to tell Rudy about her Return. Sitting across from his short body and rigid face at his kitchen table, I told him after my second sip of honeyed tea.

Rudy lurched forward and grabbed my hands. “We can help each other,” he said, his grip eager. He glanced behind me at a wilting potted fern near a double-sided window.

“You didn’t want him to be outside,” I said, facing the fern. Rudy inched his chair closer to mine, placing our hands in his lap.

“He hated the outside. He always said being outside was for heathens and the homeless,” Rudy said. I thought about his father the fern watching Rudy make his morning oatmeal each day and scrutinizing his second spoonful of sugar and wondering why Rudy’s wasting the life he gave him.

“I knew we were connected, Marie. I’ve always known. Don’t you see? This proves it,” Rudy said. He stared intently, willing for me to feel something—his desire, his need, his regret.

“He always said we’d be together. Even after I told him you were with her. He laughed and said just to wait. That you’d need more, that you’d come around,” Rudy told me, his hands gripping tighter. I felt the tendrils of his fantasies choke me.

As bubbles of sweat swarmed the bristles of Rudy’s eyebrows, I suddenly longed for Rachel and her pointless tattoo and her talkative hands.

When I returned to the cabin, I found her in bed, feigning sleep. Her eyes were shut but her breaths quick. Behind her, I slid my arm along hers, and traced the black square at the base of her neck with my other hand. I heard the drops hit her pillow, muted. I clutched her hand because I could not bear being a part of the Problem. I pressed down into her skin, pressing my apology into each corner of the square. I think she heard me because the drops dimmed and her breaths slowed.

The Doctor came by last week, for a final check-up. He held a small clipboard and poked his pen against Mother’s bark (he said “external tissues to her vascular cambium”) and scribbled notes or measurements or questions. He told me it would be his last visit, and I walked him to his small car. As he turned the key, he looked at me through the driver’s window.

“When you don’t recognize her anymore, it is done,” he said, in a soft voice very unlike his own. He drove out of the dirt driveway and as his small car disappeared past the shadows of the woods, I wondered if he feels like an arbiter of death.

I look up at Mother’s final form. I shift my bare feet against the grass, aware that Mother now extends far underneath the ground. I scan her body, lingering just above her lowest branch, and try to find her pursed lips or her sunken eyes, but I cannot. I see nothing. I feel like I should cry for her, for my mother’s Return. But if I feel anything, it’s relief.

Rachel hands me Mother’s red scarf, and I flatten it out on the ground near the base of her trunk. I place small rocks on each corner of the fabric, wondering if they will hold it there for very long. I don’t know if I care how long it remains.

There are boxes scattered along the cabin’s floor and a freshly painted “For Sale” sign stuck in the front yard. Rachel has found us a new apartment in the city two cities over. We visited the apartment last weekend, and Rachel smiled at everything. We found a nice movie theater within walking distance, an upscale grocery store with Rachel’s favorite specialty splices. We even checked out some of the preschools, and they have high reviews.

But I think my favorite part of our new city is all the concrete and metal. Everything is cloaked in grey or sheathed in silver. There isn’t any green in sight.

Ryan  
Rosenberg

  
Sun drags,

Your muffles

emotionalize ruin

For a long time 

tart limbed

Fried taut knot

amped Esso film

inhibited by conch fright

On the hillheight but here, an uncomfortable tablet

1. a kilt disclosed

2. an underwear hunt

valley punks teeter, or, veer

an inhibiting fright

a party

Ex-glissened parliament

from exterior, us, asserting zombies

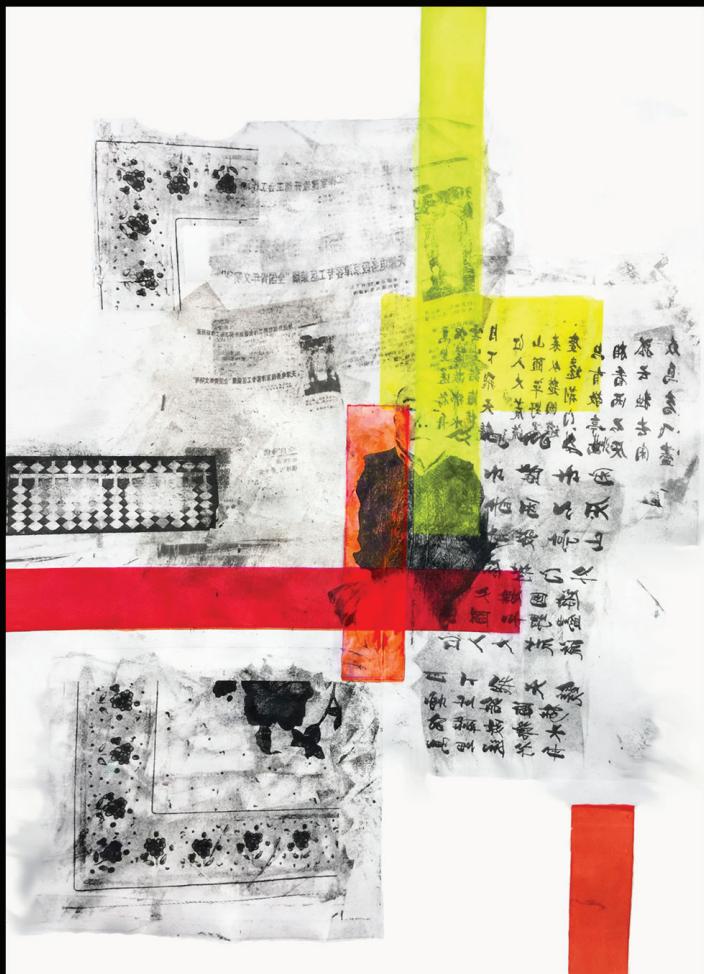
zipped Camille respectfully—was ultra emotional

factual backoff, soy gong





Ningjing  
Sun







Rachel  
Hahn





Anya  
Petit

UNINTIMATE

You've heard, no doubt, stories about mermaids coming to land, falling in love with a human man. The stories are obviously all wrong. First of all, why would they? What would they want on land that they can't find in the sea? What would they want from humans that they can't get from fish?

We were waiting outside for blond with no e. He never showed up that night, and he didn't show up most nights. It was the beginning of summer, the nights were just starting to hold onto heat from the day, but we all still wore our jackets, watched the sunset over the city. Red.

I thought about that red for a while, until Crowley got exasperated and said, "He's not coming, let's just go," and after a few half-hearted protests from everyone else, we did all just go, and after that, still thinking about that red. This was how most nights went. We usually liked to spend a good half-hour waiting for blond with no e before doing anything else. When I say we liked to do this, I don't mean we enjoyed it. It was important to pretend he was coming even if he wasn't. He was an absence we needed to observe in our lives.

We kept open an empty space where blond with no e might stand.

Maybe that red was a good thing. Maybe it meant a storm passed us by, making its way out, beyond the horizon; maybe it was leaving and never to come back. More likely though, the red was just a reflection of us, of the city it radiated down upon. Particles of dust, smoke, filth that we burned around us, showing us what we look like in the evening sun. And we looked beautiful.

I find myself carrying things on me indefinitely; the flashlight my mom gave me, a waterlogged deck of card, scraps of paper, a notebook I never write in, stuck and forgotten in the bottom of my backpack. And I add to that collection all the time; pick up stones, shells, tabs from aluminum cans, stuff them in my pockets throughout the day, thoughtlessly. I carry the weight of that red with me, like a burn on my own skin, think of all the ways I can feel guilty.

There was a girl once, it did happen, but not the way they tell it, and they wouldn't tell the real story if they knew it. She traded her tail for legs, but she was a fish before anything else, with gills and gaping eyes. A fish needs water to live. The sea witch wasn't nasty or mean, she just couldn't give the girl fully functioning lungs, and this was the only way. The girl comes to land, encased by sea water.

We got into our cars to go somewhere, I don't even remember where, none of the details were ever important. We turned away from the sunset, driving toward the dark blue nighttime at the other end of the world. I looked over at Diana. She was driving; we were in her car. Diana could not see red. I never asked her what she sees instead, but I suppose there isn't really a way to answer that.

We used to talk for hours on end, I remember looking into her eyes and wondering if she knew they were green. I never asked. I don't even remember what happened between then and now, because we hardly speak at all anymore. On the surface, we were still friends and we were still friends with all the same people. But even now in the car, listening to the same music, it felt like there was a layer of film between us. I wondered if the light were at just the right angle, would it look like the film of a soap bubble, transparent and reflective in a slight rainbow sheen.

Probably not. Maybe it was just particles of dust. I could imagine that more clearly. Maybe we breathed it in, and it coated our lungs as well. Whatever it is, I know it's not in my head; it's in the space between us. Whatever it is that keeps us from talking, it's as real as red in a sunset. Though maybe she can't see it.

I try to imagine my life without red. I try to imagine a life without storms on the horizon or pollution in the air. Red is the longest wavelength of light that is visible to the human eye. Longer than red is *infrared radiation*, and longer than *infrared radiation* is microwaves. I still have some sort of mental block for understanding how colors in the sunset are on the same spectrum as the thing that heats up leftover food, but I know that I'm meant to understand that they are all waves, and I can understand waves well enough.

I've been told that these strange light waves function the same as ocean waves, but I know it's not that simple. Light waves experience material, but they don't experience friction. I know that waves in the ocean drag on the ocean floor, become heavy in themselves, fall over and break on the shore. The east coast has smaller waves, because the ocean floor is gradual, the water waves can feel the floor so early on that they break and fall without being able to build themselves up large.

But the west coast is on active plate boundaries. The Pacific Ocean is subducting underneath the continent, so there's a steep drop in the ocean. The ocean is much deeper much closer to shore. The water doesn't feel the bottom as it's building up into waves until the very end. Only right before it

breaks does the wave catch the bottom of the floor, drag itself and tumble forward onto shore. It knows height because it knows depth.

The water floats around her, defying earth's gravity, swaying in its own currents. The breeze would send ripples across its surface, but didn't affect the water within, which kept up its continuous, smooth motion. In a way she wasn't even on land. She was in an aquarium without glass.

For a while people believed blood was blue without oxygen, and they believed it was blue inside our bodies. That was a thing they used to tell each other. The librarian at my elementary school told us that. The idea was that blood turned red only when it was exposed to air outside our bodies. That doesn't make sense, because the function of blood is to carry oxygen throughout our bodies. Aside from that, human blood doesn't turn blue. It's always red. Bright red with oxygen, dark red depleted of oxygen. It's red because of hemoglobin. The red is a physical thing.

Veins look blue through pale skin, but so far as I've read, that's because of the skin, not the blood. The pale skin acts as a membrane that light hits and is absorbed by, and reflects back off of, and for some reason the material absorbs the red from light and lets blue reflect back, so we see blue when it isn't even there. It's funny how those stories get passed along, sometimes you still hear it. "We're all dark blue on the inside." It'd be nice to believe we were.

The skin is like air in that way, a material barrier that alters what we see. Often, air becomes nothing in our minds, just emptiness we exist in. But it is material. Material we're so intimately familiar with that we often don't even register its touch. And that's the trick of it. We think it's nothing, it's

weightless, it's invisible.

With the right angle of the sun's rays, it thickens, becomes opaque blue sky against the dark backdrop of space. Then I suppose it's translucent, bending light into red, pink, gold sunset, and finally transparent again at night.

Or nearly transparent. I suppose there is always airglow.

She was happy anyway, teetering on shaking legs, across the soft dry sand. Her knees were weak and tingling and dropped her many times, but she laughed, hitting the soft ground with a hard thud and a splash of her watery force field. The weight of her body was not something she had ever known before. It pleased her in a way she had not expected.

Later that night, I walked home. Nothing memorable happened, but I remember going home. It was late, no cars passed me on my walk; all the lights were off when I got to my house. I pulled the flimsy screen door open, then unlocked the front door and pushed through. The house was still and dark, and turning a light on felt wrong. I would have to feel my way to the stairs later. I set my bag down and stepped back outside.

The faint haze of crickets flooded the warm air around me. I sat down on the concrete of the walkway, still warm from the heat of the day. I leaned back to lie down and look at the sky. You could only see a few stars from here. I knew there were more. I knew there was more.

I put my hands on my stomach and took deep breaths, feeling it rise and fall slowly. If I was very still I could feel my pulse, in the crook of my elbows, resting on my stomach, anywhere. I remember trying to check my pulse as a child, gripping my wrist, pushing my thumb into my skin trying to find it. It seemed so elusive then, it felt like it was escaping

me. Now here it was, a gentle thrum I could see on my skin. It emerged on its own if I let it.

I imagined my body melting into the concrete, tried to feel it happen. I didn't know what I wanted anymore. I was hovering. Never fully in any place. I pictured the melting, tried to imagine what it would feel like if my body were dispersed across the surface of the ground, what it would feel like if someone walked over me. A few ants crawl around my legs and feet. I sigh, pull myself off the ground and go inside.

When she spoke, bubbles floated out of her mouth, gurgling and popping above her head. It was just the water. The sea witch didn't steal her voice. The sea witch lived in the depths of the ocean, what would she do with a voice down there? It was simple and not malign. The girl couldn't talk to humans through the water.

A few weeks earlier now. "Have you seen blond with no e recently?" Diana asked, slightly breathless as she rushed into class and set her books down on the desk next to me. "I can't even remember the last time I saw him."

"Not sure..." I said. "Lunch a few days ago?"

"I passed him in the hallway earlier," offered Nat, who sat in the row behind us.

"Thanks," Diana said. "Just checking to make sure that my best friend isn't dead."

Best friend. It was funny, we all still thought of him that way despite how infrequently we actually saw him. Who knows what he even did with all his time, he might have been doing anything.

"You had lunch with him?" Diana asked.

"Yeah, Liam and Eugene were there, too."

"How dare you," she scoffed. "Didn't even invite me."

"I'll invite you next time," I say.

“Good,” she smirks. She wasn’t really upset about this, but it was important for her to be present when things happened. Blond with no e was a sort of touchstone to our friend group, seeing him occasionally validated that you were still part of it.

For all the frustration and wasted half-hours, I have a lot to owe to blond with no e’s lateness. When we were fourteen, we decided we were going to run away. He was so late, we missed the bus we were going to take to Phoenix. I remember watching the bus pull up to the stop, pause, open its doors and wait, feeling nervous, not knowing if I should step on or not. The driver stepped off, started checking people’s tickets, stowing their luggage in the compartment below the bus. I stood back, not offering my ticket, not moving any closer to the doors. Eventually the bus driver made his way to me. “You have a ticket?” he asked. I kept looking, transfixed, at the doors, not shifting my gaze to look at him. I shook my head. “No.”

And then I watched the bus drive off without me. I remember standing there not moving for twenty more minutes, not even sure what had just happened or what it meant, and then blond with no e ran up to me, out of breath and frantic. He looked nervous and guilty. I didn’t say anything, just watched him catch his breath, and then twisted in turmoil, he said, “I think I want to go to college.”

It was actually very funny and sweet, the way we didn’t understand what we were doing at all and the sheer earnestness with which we worried. After that, we sat on the curb by the bus stop for probably hours. We had a long conversation about how maybe we could stay here. Maybe we could stay in school and play the grown up’s game just long enough. We’d be outsmarting them though, we’d be outsmarting the grown ups because they didn’t know that we were only here because we deigned to be. They didn’t control us. We didn’t have to be here, we were just being strategic. We had plans. We were playing the long game.

I don’t even know what we thought we would have done

in Phoenix. The excitement was all in the running away, we had no real plan beyond that.

And after that we started seeing him a lot less. It was gradual at first, but I know that's when it started. We didn't tell anyone else about running away, not before, not after, and we didn't do it, and then he started to fade off. I started to fade off, too, in my own way. I stayed physically present, but I stopped telling people about myself. I had a whole life when I was alone. I would stay up all night writing stories about the end of the world, then go to school the next day, sit back and listen to my friends complain about how tired they were and how it was only tuesday. I would stay up doing other things, too, sometimes just watching airplanes fly off outside my window. And somehow along the way sealing my heart somewhere deeper in my chest than anyone would be able to reach.

I picture blond with no e's fourteen-year old face, worriedly admitting he wants to go to college, and I like to imagine blond with no e taking extra classes at a community college, and writing plays in his downtime, and maybe that's why he never shows up. He could just as well be doing nearly anything else, though, too.

We all gaped at her, strangest thing we had ever seen, gave her fruit to eat. But what she wanted was raw fish, the taste of cold blood and scales between her teeth. She looked like a strange girl to us. We didn't understand she was an animal.

“Have you come home recently?”

“Have I...?”

“Have you come home recently?” my mother reiterated.

“What does that mean?” I wondered out loud.

“I haven't seen you all week, where have you been?” she asked.

Where had I been? “Friends’ houses,” I told her.

“Which friends?” she asked.

It went on like this for a while. I was loosing track of time. I suppose I have only been at home when they’ve all been at work or asleep recently. I don’t tell her this, because this is somehow worse. I have been at home, just at the wrong hours.

She tells me to be home for dinner that night. I tell her I will be.

Then I hung up and put my phone down in the grass next to me. We’d been on summer break for a while now and I had work in an hour. I didn’t tell my mom I was at a park down the street. I was at home last night, I left while it was still dark this morning to sit in this park and watch the sunrise. I didn’t tell her that either.

I’d been doing this a lot recently, leaving the house in the darkness, going out to meet the red where it rose from. Not knowing what to do with it after that. I couldn’t pull molecules out of the air and I couldn’t hold red sunlight in my hands, and if I couldn’t do this, how was I meant to handle it?

I think of reds and blues alongside them; the blood in my body, the sky. The only difference between a sapphire and a ruby is how red the stone it. Sapphires are associated with midnight blue, but they can be any color; pink, white, green, orange, yellow, brown. A green sapphire and an emerald are different. They’re different chemically; they’re different minerals. But a pink sapphire and a ruby are both aluminum oxide. The material is the same. The distinction lies in the saturation of red, which is subjective and somewhat arbitrary. They say the difference between a sapphire and a ruby is whether you’re the buyer or the seller. There isn’t a way to quantifiably measure a difference. Though how often in life are there quantifiable differences? Quantifiability is everywhere, and yet hardly ever applies to real things. Or at least doesn’t apply in a way that is meaningful to the realness of something. I know there are lumens and lux, there’s a standard way to quantify light, but 400 lux doesn’t add any sort of meaning to sunrise. 0.27 means nothing compared to the full moon,

and 100,000 holds no weight with sunlight on my skin. Real things can only be known.

She did find the prince, and in some way maybe they loved each other. But she slept with her eyes open, and the more he looked the more fish he could see. He sent her away and she went to live on the beach.

“Has anyone heard from blond with no e?” Diana asked into the open as she dug through her purse. It was late summer now. We were at her house, about to leave. There was a party somewhere we were trying to go to. Everyone grumbled some sort of “no.”

She caught hold of her keys, pulled them up with a light clattering sound.

“I’ll try calling him,” someone offered. Of course, he did not answer his phone. He never did.

“Should we wait for him?”

“We should just go.”

Everyone started moving and suddenly I didn’t know why I was there. I didn’t know why I’d been there all those other times. I slipped out the side door as everyone started making their way toward the garage.

I exhaled deeply into the night air, a little colder than I anticipated. Maybe there was going to be a storm. I took a few steps away from the house, trying to shake off the eerie feeling of not recognizing where you are. I could hear a car engine start, then drive away, but the second car did not start. I heard the side door slide open. “Hey aren’t you coming?”

It was Diana.

“Umm,” I hesitated. “I don’t think that I am.”

“Why not? Is something wrong?”

I knew I should probably gloss over the truth and say

everything was fine, but instead I said, “Well, nothing’s... right.”

She stepped outside of the doorframe, stepped down onto the concrete with me. “What’s the matter?”

Maybe now was the time to clear the air, the air between us that felt like it had become so thick with smog, I imagined I could barely see through it. “Why don’t we...talk anymore?”

Diana looked uncomfortable. “What do you mean? I see you like every day.”

“I don’t know, we used to talk all the time, what happened?”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

She was resolute. She did not want to acknowledge that anything was different. She did not want to talk about it at all. I felt cold and hollow, like my blood stopped circulating for a second, but I didn’t want to cry about this, not here and now. We looked at each other in silence for a few minutes.

“Never mind,” I mumbled quietly in defeat, and looked away. We still did not talk, but we also didn’t move, frozen in the immense discomfort of that moment.

Finally I found my footing and took a step back. “I just don’t feel like going out tonight.”

“Are you sure? If you need a few minutes, we could wait for you,” she offered, as a last effort toward a calm sea.

“No,” I said, trying to sound reassuring. “You go ahead, I’ll wait for blond with no e.”

Diana paused, so I continued. “You know he’s terrible with directions. He’ll never find us otherwise.”

Diana could tell I didn’t want to talk any further; neither of us wanted to talk any further, so she went back inside. A few minutes later I heard her car drive away.

Two hours pass. I didn’t expect him to, but he does show up. He sits on the curb next to me, smiling into the darkness ahead of us. “You waited,” he said, pleased.

“You came,” I smiled. I could tell it meant something to him, to be waited for, to be found. And I wondered what

it was like all the times we didn't wait the extra two hours.  
Did he always show up anyway? Did he sit on the curb alone?  
“Where in the world have you been, Blond?” I sighed.

“Stuck,” he said. “I don't know, stuck somewhere,  
stuck in honey.”

“Would you have come here if I hadn't waited for you?”  
I asked.

“Would you have waited if I hadn't come?” he tossed  
back.

“I didn't know you were coming.”

“I didn't know you were waiting, either.”

“Maybe we caused each other,” I said.

He let out a breath of air, nodded, “Maybe we caused  
each other.”

We sit in silence for a while. “So where is everyone  
tonight?”

I tried clumsily to gather my thoughts. “I can't  
remember, we were supposed to catch up with them once I  
found you, but now... I don't know, so much has happened. I  
think I want to go home.”

Blond with no e nodded. “I think I want to go home,  
too.”

We stood, and I turned to give him a hug goodbye.

“Thanks for waiting,” he said.

“Thanks for coming.”

We walk away in separate directions.





Isabella  
Mellado







Skye  
Volmar





**Isabella  
Martinez**

**LA PLAZERA**

Note by the author: All of these stories are true.

It's sweltering hot. The type of heat that makes the make-up melt off the faces of women and has businessmen tugging at their ties uncomfortably and wishing that they had the nerves to wear short-sleeves because it is just too dang hot to wear a suit, I'm sorry sir. The type of heat that has lizards hiding underneath cars and birds staying in the trees.

And humid. The air is sticky, like soup. Or syrup. A syrup made of human sweat and tropical rain and pollution.

A perfectly beautiful day in Caracas, Venezuela.

The Surgeon is on the small roof, the roof that juts over the second story of the house and is easily accessible from his porch on the third floor. It's his day off – no one will call him from the hospital today. So he is at home in the guise of the father. *My father* his children call him, even when speaking to each other. Today he is daddy the handyman, daddy the repairer of windows and painter of floors. His wife is terrified of the damage he can cause.

The car pulls into the driveway; silver, with a young college girl at the wheel. The Daughter on her way home for dinner. He spots her from his precarious perch on the roof.

*Patricia! Patricia!*

She looks around, confused. Following the voice from the sky to her parents' bedroom. She's surprised to see the open window. Even more surprised to see The Surgeon sitting on the furthest corner of the roof, newly painted wood shining in the dimming light. The water proof coat has been reapplied. And clouds are gathering overhead.

*What do you think?* He asks. Hands on his hips. Fine European shirt rolled up above his elbows. Knees dirty from rubbing across the previously unprotected small wood. The roof is painted now. Jet black like fresh tar.

The Daughter couldn't care less about the paint job. She sees what her father – the brilliant man who only dedicates his mind to scholarly things and so rarely attempts to do anything remotely handy – has overlooked. He has painted himself into a corner; separated from the safe haven of the house by a sea of wet paint.

*Papa? How are you going to get back?* She asks.

*When it dries!*

*When it dries? Papa...it's starting to rain.* Sure enough, the drops have begun to fall. Fat sticky drops that only fall from a sky in the tropics. The surgeon is stranded in the corner, in the rain. He suddenly recalls that he doesn't like heights.

The Sister's boyfriend appears with a ladder as the sky really begins to cry; a small river has already formed in their perfectly kept garden with avocados, bananas, and mangos dotting the foliage.

*You all right there, Doctor Bello-Plaz?* The boyfriend asks, trying not to laugh.

*I learned my lesson,* The Surgeon tells his family as he enters the house looking like a half-drowned kitten. *No more painting.*

No more painting. But he hadn't said anything about varnishing.

\* \* \*

The next time The Surgeon had a day off, The Surgeon's Wife is prepared. She thought that their four children would be the cause of constant calls to the handy-man. But, no. Her brilliant husband created more messes in the process of being helpful than all of her children put together.

The Daughter pulls into the driveway once again. Her silver car purring in the thankfully dry air. Not a cloud is in the sky. She exits, ready for dinner, when;

*Patricia! Patricia!*

*Oh, no.* The Daughter is prepared for another disaster. She walks around the house, half-expecting to see her father stuck in a tree somewhere. But, no. He is safely on the ground. In front of beautiful full-length, wooden window shades that open out into their garden. You don't paint these shades.

But you varnish them.

*What do you think?* He asks. Hands proudly on his hips. The sleeves of his European made shirt rolled up above the elbows.

The daughter has no words. Only gapes in shock.

*I know.* The Surgeon says ruefully. *Don't look over there; those are worse.*

*Papa...*

*Your mother is going to be so upset.*

The Daughter enters the house first. The Surgeon's Wife is sitting in the living room, phone at her side. Looking furious.

*Mama? Have you seen what my father did?*

*I know,* she huffs. *I'm waiting for him to finish so that I can call the painter.*

It runs in the family. The crazy. The *hey-look-at-me* and *no-wait-a-minute-this-was-a-really-bad-idea*.

The Family Plaz. Or something like that. The officials that were letting the French immigrants into Venezuela didn't quite know what to do with the noise they were hearing. They scribbled something onto the official documents and waved them into the new world. The Family Plaz multiplied quickly

and gained fame for the gigantic messes they made in their small town. These were The Surgeon's Uncles. They were the craziest.

*La plazera.* That is what the family called it when someone went down the rabbit hole and emerged into their own Wonderland to terrorize the town or the rest of the family.

The Sister is at dental school. Rows and rows of chairs with a variety of shiny, silver dental equipment lie before the students. She is speaking with her friends when she hears a snippet of conversation behind her.

*...and suddenly she got La Plazera and there was no stopping her...*

The Sister turns. She can't believe what she just heard. She asks what it means, pretending that she hasn't heard it a million times before when The Surgeon has decided to break something in the process of fixing it.

*There was this family in my mother's town. A really big family. With lots of boys, and they were crazy like you wouldn't believe. Their last name was Plaz so whenever someone loses it, we say they got La Plazera.*

The Sister nods. Accepting this explanation without offering one in return. She heads home. Tells the rest of her family that those crazy uncles? Yeah, now their name was an idiom.

The family laughs. Even The Surgeon, as he relates tale after tale of the outrageous things his uncles used to do when they were younger.

*La Plazera.* It is a subtle curse that follows the family. Hiding in the genome to come out at unexpected times. When the little bit of crazy senses that the time is right, it explodes like a geyser of water.

A geyser that has been kept under pressure from the

carefully tuned plumbing system of a house in Northern California, USA. Almost three years of drought has made The Surgeon's grand-daughters very water conscious. Short showers and tightly closed faucets.

But their minds aren't on the drought. The Older Grand-daughter is back home from college and is giving the Younger Grand-daughter that look. The *oh-you-messed-up look*. Because the Younger Grand-daughter – new license shining on printed plastic in her purse – has backed into the outside parking space in their front yard in such a way that the Older Grand-daughter cannot get out of the passenger seat.

*You need to do it again.*

*Don't tell me what to do!* Both girls are laughing. It's already the second time the Younger Grand-daughter has attempted to park in this space.

*Let me out in front of the house.* The Older Grand-daughter simply wants to get out of the car.

*No! I'm going to do it right.*

The Younger Grand-daughter backs into the space. A strange crunching noise accompanies the sound of the engine dying down as she proudly presses the black button that has taken the place of traditional keys.

*What was that?* They look at each other. The Older Grand-daughter open the door – plenty of space this time – and promptly shouts.

*Sissy!!*

*What?!*

They have driven right over the outside plumbing. The blue geyser is spraying high into the air. Precious water falling uselessly on the dry concrete and on the two frantically shouting girls as they look at the mess they have made. *La Plazera.*

*You have to tell them that you did it!* Younger Grand-daughter shouts.

*What? No!*

*They'll never let me drive again!*

The water is falling relentlessly on the pair of them.

The Older Grand-daughter tries to force the water valve shut.  
It comes off in her hand.

*I don't want to get into trouble!* Older Grand-daughter says.  
*Go next door and get Mr. S.*

*Okay! But you have to take the blame!*

*No!*

Younger Grand-daughter runs off as Older Grand-daughter adds, *Tell them a deer did it!*

A deer. Right. Because a deer could completely destroy a pile of plastic and metal pipes. To be fair, their street is home to a large family of deer. And they're probably thirsty too.

Younger Grand-daughter comes back with an amused neighbor a few seconds before their parents pull up in a shiny, navy blue convertible.

*Okay.* Younger Grand-daughter sighs. Reminiscent of Christian Martyrs nobly going to their death in Rome. *I will take the blame.*

Older Grand-daughter looks at her as if she's gone crazy. *I was NEVER going to take the blame!*

The two start to laugh; soaking wet in the dry heat of California as a pair of exasperated yet amused parents take in the water and the neighbor and the car.

Elaine  
Tsai

