

Cousins

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For a very long time, they pretended to stare at us. Their faces were streaked with green and black face paint, their grins as large as crescent moons, and their tiny arms filled with orange and blue toy guns. Although I thought their eyes wandered between our blurry faces (their vision so obviously obscured by the comically sized pink goggles they had on), and the dinner table set in front of us, I noticed, just barely, that they stared at something else.

The window behind us danced in unsightly colors: aquamarines, maroons, then neon greens and sunflower yellows. Even the sun lost its flare of white in exchange for a swirling sea of red and orange, something so unordinary that I swore I was dreaming.

I looked back to see that everyone else exchanged glances, happy faces, slight words of, “Oh, I hope we aren’t dinner tonight for these predators,” before motioning to the gathering of children. They didn’t see what I saw outside.

I didn’t look away from the window for a little while, and eventually, three heads were bobbing next to mine as we peered over the sill and stared fixedly outside. Everyone else had resumed their chatter, and it was only the three of us, myself and my cousins, watching the window as a scattering of deer and rabbits fled the golden hillside at the sound and sight of a car.

I wondered if they saw it too: a bedazzled and scintillating spark of fire crossed the dark

pavement before disappearing down the hill. Perhaps they noticed the gaggle of geese-headed does— all doe, no buck— that wore cloaks of tabby and gray alternating pelts. And in the field, everything was so strangely geometric. All of it was shattered into fragments of squares and rectangles, some octagons with edges of red and blue, while the rest was a mix of triangles and lines that jutted from the soft hillside. Could they see it too?

I looked out further in search of neighboring houses— I stood, glanced, leaned and arched to gather every angle of the scene outside, but no green hill exposed a flake of house nor life besides their trees.

I remembered this scene so differently than how I saw it. I worried that the confusion and the mess would make me too anxious to concentrate on anything else—and more importantly, I worried that I would eventually forget the original picture in turn for the overwhelming mess before me. I worried I would never be able to find what I saw beautiful again.

But just below the windowsill, the flowers were perfect, and they were glowing with a red light from the sun above. Just like they do in the movies. And, for a moment, I reflected that they were one of the few things that looked the same as they did yesterday and the day before.

“The flowers are so pretty today,” I mumbled.

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The two boys glanced back up at me, removed their goggles, and nodded. They glanced back at the people and then at the window again, with a look of uncertainty that I knew stemmed from a feeling of concern for me.

The chatter of the crowd behind us was dizzying and overwhelming, so when I turned back to the living room where we sat, I was terrified to see that the people and the things that I thought would remain stagnant were almost as geometric as the outside. I could only sit and stare, with a breath I could not catch and a mind that was virtually silent.

Then, the boy next to me put a hand on my shoulder and smiled. I sucked in a shallow breath.

“Do you want to play with us? We have an extra Nerf gun. Your mom said you could play with it this time,” he grinned. He was missing his two front teeth.

When I blinked, I saw my mom in the haze of the familial crowd. She was all geometric, but now no one else was. I tried to smile, and so did she, but she looked so strange when compared to everyone else.

I mustered a feeling of admiration, because her smile was clear and white, and her eyes were full of a love for me that I know she couldn’t quite tell me yet.

“Yes please,” I said.