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(Macy sets up the television as we hear the play-by-play tune in. Macy sits down in a chair and opens a bag of chips. He begins to crunch loudly as the announcer’s voice is crisply articulating the action. Macy watches entranced. Peter looks bored.)

Macy: Now this is what I call bonding.

FADE TO BLACK
Macy: You wouldn't have been fooling with me? I mean the number might not have just been eleven and when I guessed eleven your secret number turned into nineteen. That wouldn't have been a possibility, now would it?

Peter: You'll just have to take me at my word.

Macy: But don't you see, I don't know you. How do I know that you're not lying? How do I know you're not playing me for a fool. I mean I don't know you.

Peter: That's what I thought we're doing, getting to know each other. We could get to know each other very well, all the time we'll be spending together. I think it's good that we played this game. I think it was a good way to break the ice. Now I feel more comfortable with you. Now I feel that we can talk openly about important issues. That's very important to me, talking about the issues. We'll have plenty of time to do that. We'll have plenty of time just to sit around and talk about our families, our beliefs. We can really talk. And who cares that you didn't know my number was nineteen, that's not the important thing. It's that you tried your best and we're both winners because we both played.

Macy: You know something? I think you may have hit on something missing in most relationships; the ability to be at peace with each other. I would like to share something with you.

Peter: What's that?

Macy: The Tanks are playing right now and I brought my portable television. How about you and me sit here and watch the game? That would be great.

Molly Atwell

After the Storm

When my grandmother visited that year, she looped an old wooden rosary over my bedpost. "You might need it," she said darkly; she didn't bother to explain herself, and I was left to imagine vampires kneeling by my bed to say their prayers. But she was right, I did need it: the warm regularity of the beads slipping between my fingers, the crucifix clutched in my hand like a loaded gun. It wasn't long before I developed a Jesus welt on my palm, a small hole almost the exact tone and color of scabbed-over stigmata.

With the rosary close by, I usually slept straight through to morning, but there were never guarantees. The night Hurricane Cara came through, I was sitting up until three in the morning, mumbling the Hail Mary over and over, straining to hear under the wind and rain. Cara was just coming in from the South Carolina coastline; the kamikaze storm beat itself to death on the rise of our ridge. When I woke at five, in the morning dusk, it was to silence and the lingering smell of ozone. Still wrapped in sleep like cotton wool, I threw my legs over the side of the bed and stumbled to the window. The rain-wet pavement glowed with streetlight sheen; the sky was still gray, cautiously lightening. I wanted to stick my head out, to let the wind run over my skin and steam my eyes open, but the lock was stuck. I laid my cheek against the glass and made my breathing slow, calm, erratic. My father was snoring in the master bedroom, and I fought against that rhythm, the arrogant meter of his respiration.

I went first to my brother's bedroom, across the hall from mine. He was lying sideways, sheathed in a cocoon of light summer blankets, his head tucked into the space between his shoulders. I had to put my hand on his chest to make sure he was breathing. When I touched him, electricity ran the length of his body; his eyelids fluttered, but he didn't wake up.
My mother was in the guest room. I knew all along she was there, that it was her presence, the smooth constancy of her sleep, that had kept our house from being struck by lightning. When I put my hand on the doorknob, I paused for a moment. I opened the door by degrees, letting the pale light strike my face in sections: my chin, my cheek, my wrinkled forehead. She lay sprawled over the blankets, her arms outstretched, the window flung open for air. The white gauze curtains drifted, dragging across her chest. I found a space under her arm where my whole body could fit, and I crawled into it backwards. She stirred, tensed, then relaxed again. My mother was soft now, which was something she never was in full daylight. I let my fingers play along the arch of her elbow: the creases, the pleats in the reluctantly sagging skin, seemed to me the definition of beauty, as if our history could be traced on the map of her body.

As my eyes dropped closed, I realized the electricity had gone out of the air, that my body was as limp and cool as running water. Just before my head fell, I felt her raise her hand, felt it pause almost touching my braids, but she did not touch me or speak. In this room, we could not hear my father snoring, and I didn't need a crucifix. I let myself exhale.
(Macy takes the gun and places it back in his holster. He goes and sits down in a chair.)

Peter: When's he supposed to get here?
Macy: Five minutes ago.
Peter: He usually late?
Macy: He comes when he wants, it's not our choice, you know.

(There is a long silence.)
Peter: Are you mad at me about something?
Macy: No, why?
Peter: You look like you're mad about something.
Macy: No, I'm not mad.

(A beat.)
Macy: Maybe I feel a little taken advantage of. Maybe that's what I feel but not mad, certainly not mad. I mean you tell me about your childhood, I feel that we're making a connection and you won't even play the game with me. Am I not good enough to play your game?
Peter: I never said that.
Macy: We don't have to bet. Would you play me if we didn't have to bet?
Peter: If we don't have to bet I would be more than happy to play the game with you.

Courtney Krantz

Crests

Through the darkness of the room, our bodies pressed together in the small bed, my hands smoothed over your back and up your neck. Your heartbeat throbbed in my chest.

Snow fell quietly outside, covering the curves and mounds of the earth; soft, white crests. The frozen lake, just past the darkness of the trees, pulsed underneath its still, vast blanket.
Andrea Maio

Hot Springs

In the half dreaming dark the Florida moon keeps colors rich while the swamp remains sonorous green, the pool trim wet red. We watch for snakes and crocodiles that could crawl over the road and slip under the vermilion surface of the quickly cooling water.

Our legs puncture the surface, and find themselves submerged, pregnant with light, shades of blue then sulfur yellow, then deeper colors in between.

Your little brothers, three of them, come hooting and stammering out of a glowing motel room and run circles around us. For a moment our lungs catch on laughter.

We move slowly through the water, sensing one another. We cast down our eyes, let them sink to the bottom. What is this silence between us? This steam? When did we grow into women with thighs as thick as the moon, with stomachs as round.

A moment ago, we stood at a mirror planning our bodies; the curves that would come, the colors we'd wear. Cousin, come closer, I have something to tell you: remember the time and remember the time? But you have dunked under, and so I dive after, the two of us sinking, as silent as stones, through layers of blue into the dark.

Peter: I don't know.

Macy: How about I get to break your legs?

Peter: Break my legs?

Macy: I'm just throwing out ideas here.

Peter: Let me get this straight. You guess my number, you break my legs?

(Macy nods.)

Peter: Don't you think that's a little sadistic? This is just a game.

Macy: Nothing is just a game.

Peter: Well this is. This is just a game that I played with my father. We didn't break each other's legs if we lost. We kept playing until we were both winners. That was the point.

Macy: And I say, that's no fun. I say there's no such thing as two people coming out winners. I say you gotta put a risk to it or there's no point in playing. Okay, I won't break your legs, how about a finger?

Peter: You can't be serious. Why don't we just play Russian roulette?

Macy: All right.

(Macy removes a gun from his pocket and sets it on the table.)

Peter: I wasn't serious. I was kidding.

Macy: Then don't say that.
Macy: If I guess your number in four tries, I'm awarded something that I find desirable.

Peter: This isn't really a betting game.

Macy: C'mon, it's called upping the stakes. C'mon, let's just have a little fun.

Peter: All right, I'll bet you five dollars.

Macy: Five dollars?

Peter: Yeah.

Macy: No, no. You're missing the point again. You bet me something worthwhile. Something that matters to you. That is the whole point of betting. That is why people bet in the first place. If you win, you get something that you want. If you lose, you suffer the consequences that you've made for yourself. You think when the Tanks lose, they can just go off the field with no consequences? They can't. They have to pay for what they've done. The coach of the team, he gives each of the players a talking to. Now I'll tell you something that very few fellows know. I have a friend who works on the Tanks establishment and he told me that individual players who are responsible for the loss, he told me they're severely punished.

Peter: How's that?

Macy: This coach has one of his goons break the players legs. Now I know that sounds extreme but that's the way sports must be played. If you don't deliver the win, you're worthless to the team, the sport, the world. That's the way I look at it and so does the coach. That's the idea of betting. That's the idea of anything. So what do you want to bet?

Jill Warsett

Without Words, It Comes

There were no words exchanged between us on the hot summer mornings we spent on Anna's porch in Miami. All afternoon, she would concentrate on the marble she sculpted into different shapes, and I was content to sit with a joint in hand and watch her work. Anna didn't need people. She was an artist. Sometimes her brother, Ben, would join us out there. He didn't talk much, but he made good company.

Hey, girls," he said on one particularly hot day. He stretched his arms up to the roof and opened a porch window for the humid air to rush over our sweaty bodies.

Anna didn't look up. She was sitting Indian-style with her brown hair tied up in a braid, carving a block of marble into the Chinese character for power. Ben had shown her the picture in one of his books on Taoism. Anna kept tracing her fingers over the old, yellow page, comparing her figure to the image.

Ben sat down, embracing his bass guitar, and plucking the strings with his amps off so no noise came out. Anna was working and he didn't want to disturb her. I passed him my joint and he held it for a long time before he took a hit. Anna looked up from her knife and marble and Ben gave her the roach. She put her sculpture down and stretched out her bony, white legs, knocking over a dead plant.

Anna worked until the sun wouldn't shine, and when night came I went home. Everyday was the same. I would drive over after breakfast and sit silently with Anna. Sometimes I brought a book and read, the noise of metal shaping marble in the background. I had been reading all of the poetry books on Ben's shelves, making notes in the columns and highlighting passages that I liked. Lillian Smith made sense to me and I almost cried when I read The Journey.

Anna's sculptures began to accumulate around the windowsills.
Ben had put some of the little foxes, Chinese characters, and Greek gods that she had created in his room to give Anna more space on the porch. We had moved the bass guitar to the garage and the dead plants were taken to the patio in the back of the house. With just the three of us out there, I was suddenly aware of Anna. She was separated from every person on earth and even separated from herself, somehow.

"Where do you go all day long?" my mother asked one night when I arrived home after dinner.

"Anna's." I picked up a fork and grabbed the leftovers from the stove.

"Every day?" My mother wanted to know.

"Yeah. I like being with her." I put down my fork and got up, leaving my plate on the table for my mother to wash. "I'll be in my room."

The next afternoon, Anna asked if I'd like to have one of her sculptures. She picked out a tiny statue of a tree. Little marble leaves hung from the rigid branches and the trunk resembled a woman's body.

I had tried to slip it into my room, but my mother greeted me at the door.

"What a nice sculpture," she said, taking it into her own hands. Her lips pursed in worryment, she looked like she was going to cry. Anything I did with Anna troubled her. "Did Anna make that?"

I nodded and stood waiting for her to finish examining it. When my father came home later, I thought of my parents discussing me in private.

That night in my room, I took that sculpture out and studied it. Sliding my fingers over the little marble figurine, I could feel the branches and the thighs and the leaves and the breasts in their soft sculpted places. Anna picked the most beautiful one for me.

I called Anna and I asked her to meet me that night on the beach near her home. I wanted to look at her.

I carried my lighter and cigarettes in my jacket pocket and drove over to the wooden steps that led to the sea. It was cold, but I would
Peter: I don't think you would find it very amusing.

Macy: I find plenty of different things amusing. I find gardening amusing. Would you guess that a guy like me would find gardening amusing? I sure as hell don't think so, but I do. I have a garden at home. I plant carrots. I love carrots. I find carrots very amusing. I bet you wouldn't have guessed that either but I do.

Peter: All right, we can give it a shot.

Macy: So we'll play a game?

Peter: If you really want to.

Macy: Hell yes I want to. I mean we're going to be spending some time together from now on. We should know each other and I don't mean sexually. That's what my last partner thought I meant by getting to know each other and he wanted to hold hands and sing nursery rhymes with me. I don't go in for that kind of business. I think it's only fair that you should know that.

Peter: Thank you.

Macy: Sure. So tell me the game.

Peter: It's not all that complicated.

Macy: That doesn't bother me. I find complicated games a bore.

Peter: The idea of the game is that I think of a number one through twenty and you try and guess it.

(A long beat.)

Macy: I try to guess it?
I Watched and Did Not Speak

I saw it by accident, rounding
the corner for my noon cigarette, and I stood by
and watched, though my stomach burned
with shame and churned when I saw the blood
splatter crimson across the ice.
There were faces I recognized and some that I didn’t
in that group, packed in a circle around one boy
I knew from school.
The next minute remains in streaks: the snow,
the faces drawn cold with hate, the harsh snarl of the fight,
the boy’s body shuddering from one punch to another.
Then he was on the ground and they left,
tramping the other way down the alley with a final laugh
or insult. He didn’t turn his head to watch them leave.

For a moment, the icy grey of the afternoon
dissolved and my sight blurred.
I walked towards the boy and helped him up,
I gave him my scarf.
Blood still streamed from his nose and the red
dripped down into the smear of his lipstick
which now covered most of his jaw, part of one cheek.
He looked like a maudlin clown,
standing there against the white of the snow,
and when I put my arms around him, he began to cry.
I stammered an apology and walked him
to his car where he thanked me and drove away.
Alone in the alley, I scuffed an “X” with my heel
into the ice-capped ground and smoked in silence.

Peter: I did plenty of other things to compensate for not playing catch
with my father.

Macy: What did you guys do?

Peter: We played games.

Macy: You and your pop played games?

Peter: Yeah.

Macy: What kind of games?

Peter: Just games.

(A beat.)

Macy: You want to play one?

Peter: What?

Macy: While we wait. You want to play a game while we wait? Pass the
time.

(A beat.)

Peter: I don’t know if I could remember any of them.

Macy: Sure you do.

Peter: No, I really doubt if I can.

Macy: C’mon.

(A beat.)
Macy: Man oh man, you must be a workaholic or something. Those people love to work. You ever heard that word before?

Peter: Yes.

Macy: Then that's what you must be. I've been working for this company for the past year, not bad at all, but I get a week or two off here and there. I couldn't go straight through, that would be downright rotten. That would be over doing it and I only have this one job.

Peter: It's not that bad. You get used to it.

Macy: You don't even have time to watch the goddam Tanks, what's good about that? I don't know about you, well actually now I do know about you, but I would not be myself if I didn't watch the goddam Tanks. They've become a part of me. I grew up with them for god-sakes. I remember when I was a youngster, my pop and I would play ball in this tire lot by our place. He would announce like I was some super-star player on some professional team. Made me feel like a king. There comes a time when you gotta stop the jabbering of the tongue, and just watch the Tanks, it's as simple as that.

(A beat.)

You ever play catch with your pop?

Peter: Nope.

Macy: Oh. You missed out my friend, you missed out big time.

Peter: I don't think I did. It all depends on the way you look on it.

Macy: How do you look on it?

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Rana Al-Saadi

The Magician

You offered your name like a song over the beat of the drums you played. Hands in motion, drumming the beat of your heart, fingers painted with rainbow and earth, you smiled at me in Late Summer sun.

I came again in Fall to hear your heart, your laughter, the voice that stroked me like a lover's fingers. This time your hair poured down your shoulders and your eyes were the color of grass beneath the strands of sun. I let your beauty charm me.

As Autumn nights grew colder, I listened to your songs for warmth, but you only offered petals from the flowers deep inside you. And as you drew my portrait on a night when snow was falling, I let my sour tears drop cold upon my lap. They turned to jewels as you followed their path and sketched them in your drawing.

In Springtime you made pennies disappear. I sat still as you moved yourself closer, pulling one out of my ear, a half-smile slanting the side of your perfect face. I slipped into your palm like that tarnished penny and I said I love you as you flipped it in the air.

You chose to never catch me and I am still turning, suspended somewhere above your golden words.
Blood Song

The child I don’t have yet
haunts the hollow chambers of my body.
She stretches her arms to see if she can master
that vast starless world inside me.

Her eyes are closed in a seamless sleep,
her lips parted slightly
as if she were translating the rustling of my blood.
I know she can hear my thoughts
through the white telegraph of my spine,
the child-heavy thoughts that fill me now.

She dreams my dreams as well,
the colors blooming slowly inside her head.
The stories, the songs, the voices of the women before me
engrave themselves on the walls of her veins,
the hymnal of her soul.

In the hollow chambers of my body,
entranced by the low murmur of my heart,
the child I don’t have yet waits.
I imagine her small hands clenching
and unclenching,
this tiny oracle of my blood.

Playing the Game

(An apartment. Two men are waiting.)

Macy: You see the game?

Peter: Nope.

(A beat.)

Macy: Good game. The Tanks were playing hot. Oh, those Tanks, they’re a great club, you know that? You should be watching them. I think they’re gonna surprise a lot of people this year, I’d bet on it.

Peter: I don’t watch much sports.

Macy: Really?

Peter: Nope.

(A beat.)

Macy: What do you do then, in your free time?

Peter: Don’t have much free time.

Macy: You don’t have much free time?

Peter: Nope. Like to keep busy.

Macy: You’re telling me that you work most every day?

Peter: I have other jobs besides this one.
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Peter: The idea of the game is that I think of a number one through twenty and you try and guess it.

(A long beat.)

Macy: I try to guess it?

As soon as I lit up, I could see Anna by the water. She stood with her bare feet in the sand, allowing the ocean to wash over them. I was cold sitting there, but I waited for her. Anna knew where I was. She sat down in the sand letting the tide brush her feet.

My cigarette was glowing in the black night. I knew the beach. Every time it breathed out water, I could feel myself doing the same. I leaned back on the steps, closed my eyes, and listened to the hum of the sea.

Anna stayed down in the sand for hours. The sun began to pull up from under the water and by then I had less than half a pack of cigarettes left. I lit another one and breathed in the salty taste of the ocean.

I watched Anna get up and come sit down on the steps beside me. I ran my hand through her brown hair and let my head rest on her shoulder. We sat like that for a long time, not saying a word.
Ben had put some of the little foxes, Chinese characters, and Greek gods that she had created in his room to give Anna more space on the porch. We had moved the bass guitar to the garage and the dead plants were taken to the patio in the back of the house. With just the three of us out there, I was suddenly aware of Anna. She was separated from every person on earth and even separated from herself, somehow.

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I carried my lighter and cigarettes in my jacket pocket and drove over to the wooden steps that led to the sea. It was cold, but I would

Peter: Yes.

(Another long beat.)

Macy: That’s it. You think of a number and then I try to guess it? That’s all? There’s nothing else to it.

Peter: No.

Macy: It sure isn’t very complicated. But that’s all right. That’s just fine. But tell me something, how do I know that you won’t change your number once you pick it?

Peter: I don’t cheat.

Macy: So what happens if I guess the number? What do I win?

Peter: Then it’s your turn to pick a number and for me to guess.

Macy: That’s what I win, that’s no fun. It’s gotta be something fun.

Peter: I didn’t say the game was fun, I said it was what I did with my father when I was growing up. It was just a game we would play to pass the time.

Macy: And what I’m saying is that if I guess your goddamn number, I want something to happen. I don’t want to be given the privilege of thinking of my own number. That’s no fun I’m telling you. I want something of substance.

Peter: Like what?

Macy: We should make a bet, that’s what we should do.

Peter: Bet something?
Macy: If I guess your number in four tries, I'm awarded something that I find desirable.

Peter: This isn't really a betting game.

Macy: C'mon, it's called upping the stakes. C'mon, let's just have a little fun.

Peter: All right, I'll bet you five dollars.

Macy: Five dollars?

Peter: Yeah.

Macy: No, no. You're missing the point again. You bet me something worthwhile. Something that matters to you. That is the whole point of betting. That is why people bet in the first place. If you win, you get something that you want. If you lose, you suffer the consequences that you've made for yourself. You think when the Tanks lose, they can just go off the field with no consequences? They can't. They have got to pay for what they've done. The coach of the team, he gives each of the players a talking to. Now I'll tell you something that very few fellas know. I have a friend who works on the Tanks establishment and he told me that individual players who are responsible for the loss, he told me they're severely punished.

Peter: How's that?

Macy: This coach has one of his goons break the players legs. Now I know that sounds extreme but that's the way sports must be played. If you don't deliver the win, you're worthless to the team, the sport, the world. That's the way I look at it and so does the coach. That's the idea of betting. That's the idea of anything. So what do you want to bet?

Jill Warsett

Without Words, It Comes

There were no words exchanged between us on the hot summer mornings we spent on Anna's porch in Miami. All afternoon, she would concentrate on the marble she sculpted into different shapes, and I was content to sit with a joint in hand and watch her work. Anna didn't need people. She was an artist. Sometimes her brother, Ben, would join us out there. He didn't talk much, but he made good company.

Hey, girls," he said on one particularly hot day. He stretched his arms up to the roof and opened a porch window for the humid air to rush over our sweaty bodies.

Anna didn't look up. She was sitting Indian-style with her brown hair tied up in a braid, carving a block of marble into the Chinese character for power. Ben had shown her the picture in one of his books on Taoism. Anna kept tracing her fingers over the old, yellow page, comparing her figure to the image.

Ben sat down, embracing his bass guitar, and plucking the strings with his amps off so no noise came out. Anna was working and he didn't want to disturb her. I passed him my joint and he held it for a long time before he took a hit. Anna looked up from her knife and marble and Ben gave her the roach. She put her sculpture down and stretched out her bony, white legs, knocking over a dead plant.

Anna worked until the sun wouldn't shine, and when night came I went home. Everyday was the same. I would drive over after breakfast and sit silently with Anna. Sometimes I brought a book and read, the noise of metal shaping marble in the background. I had been reading all of the poetry books on Ben's shelves, making notes in the columns and highlighting passages that I liked. Lillian Smith made sense to me and I almost cried when I read The Journey.

Anna's sculptures began to accumulate around the windowsills.
Andrea Maio

**Hot Springs**

In the half dreaming dark the Florida moon keeps colors rich while the swamp remains sonorous green, the pool trim wet red. We watch for snakes and crocodiles that could crawl over the road and slip under the vermilion surface of the quickly cooling water.

Our legs puncture the surface, and find themselves submerged, pregnant with light, shades of blue then sulfur yellow, then deeper colors in between.

Your little brothers, three of them, come hooting and stammering out of a glowing motel room and run circles around us. For a moment our lungs catch on laughter.

We move slowly through the water, sensing one another. We cast down our eyes, let them sink to the bottom. What is this silence between us? This steam? When did we grow into women with thighs as thick as the moon, with stomachs as round. A moment ago, we stood at a mirror planning our bodies; the curves that would come, the colors we'd wear. Cousin, come closer, I have something to tell you: remember the time and remember the time? But you have dunked under, and so I dive after, the two of us sinking, as silent as stones, through layers of blue into the dark.

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Peter: I don't know.

Macy: How about I get to break your legs?

Peter: Break my legs?

Macy: I'm just throwing out ideas here.

Peter: Let me get this straight. You guess my number, you break my legs?

(Macy nods.)

Peter: Don't you think that's a little sadistic? This is just a game.

Macy: Nothing is just a game.

Peter: Well this is. This is just a game that I played with my father. We didn't break each other's legs if we lost. We kept playing until we were both winners. That was the point.

Macy: And I say, that's no fun. I say there's no such thing as two people coming out winners. I say you gotta put a risk to it or there's no point in playing. Okay, I won't break your legs, how about a finger?

Peter: You can't be serious. Why don't we just play Russian roulette?

Macy: All right.

(Macy removes a gun from his pocket and sets it on the table.)

Peter: I wasn't serious. I was kidding.

Macy: Then don't say that.
(Macy takes the gun and places it back in his holster. He goes and sits down in a chair.)

Peter: When's he supposed to get here?
Macy: Five minutes ago.
Peter: He usually late?
Macy: He comes when he wants, it's not our choice, you know.

(There is a long silence.)

Peter: Are you mad at me about something?
Macy: No, why?
Peter: You look like you're mad about something.
Macy: No, I'm not mad.
(A beat.)

Macy: Maybe I feel a little taken advantage of. Maybe that's what I feel but not mad, certainly not mad. I mean you tell me about your childhood, I feel that we're making a connection and you won't even play the game with me. Am I not good enough to play your game?

Peter: I never said that.
Macy: We don't have to bet. Would you play me if we didn't have to bet?
Peter: If we don't have to bet I would be more than happy to play the game with you.

Courtney Krantz

Crests

Through the darkness of the room, our bodies pressed together in the small bed, my hands smoothed over your back and up your neck. Your heartbeat throbbed in my chest.

Snow fell quietly outside, covering the curves and mounds of the earth; soft, white crests. The frozen lake, just past the darkness of the trees, pulsated underneath its still, vast blanket.
My mother was in the guest room. I knew all along she was in there, that it was her presence, the smooth constancy of her sleep, that had kept our house from being struck by lightning. When I put my hand on the doorknob, I paused for a moment. I opened the door by degrees, letting the pale light strike my face in sections: my chin, my cheek, my wrinkled forehead. She lay sprawled over the blankets, her arms outstretched, the window flung open for air. The white gauze curtains drifted, dragging across her chest. I found a space under her arm where my whole body could fit, and I crawled into it backwards. She stirred, tensed, then relaxed again. My mother was soft now, which was something she never was in full daylight. I let my fingers play along the arch of her elbow: the creases, the pleats in the reluctantly sagging skin, seemed to me the definition of beauty, as if our history could be traced on the map of her body.

As my eyes dropped closed, I realized the electricity had gone out of the air, that my body was as limp and cool as running water. Just before my head fell, I felt her raise her hand, felt it pause almost touching my braids, but she did not touch me or speak. In this room, we could not hear my father snoring, and I didn't need a crucifix. I let myself exhale.

Macy: All right then, great. Go ahead.
Peter: Okay, I'm thinking of a number one through twenty. You get four guesses.
Macy: All right then. Four?
Peter: No.
Macy: Eleven?
Peter: Nope.
Macy: Eighteen?
Peter: No. Think about it. Give yourself some time to concentrate.
Macy: Concentrate? What do I have to concentrate on? I'm trying to guess a goddamn number. Four?
Peter: You already said that.
Macy: Did I?
Peter: Yeah.
Macy: Fine, seven?
Peter: No, the number was nineteen.
(A moment.)
Macy: You're sure?
Peter: Positive.
Macy: You wouldn't have been fooling with me? I mean the number might not have just been eleven and when I guessed eleven your secret number turned into nineteen. That wouldn't have been a possibility, now would it?

Peter: You'll just have to take me at my word.

Macy: But don't you see, I don't know you. How do I know that you're not lying? How do I know you're not playing me for a fool. I mean I don't know you.

Peter: That's what I thought we're doing, getting to know each other. We could get to know each other very well, all the time we'll be spending together. I think it's good that we played this game. I think it was a good way to break the ice. Now I feel more comfortable with you. Now I feel that we can talk openly about important issues. That's very important to me, talking about the issues. We'll have plenty of time to do that. We'll have plenty of time just to sit around and talk about our families, our beliefs. We can really talk. And who cares that you didn't know my number was nineteen, that's not the important thing. It's that you tried your best and we're both winners because we both played.

Macy: You know something? I think you may have hit upon something missing in most relationships; the ability to be at peace with each other. I would like to share something with you.

Peter: What's that?

Macy: The Tanks are playing right now and I brought my portable television. How about you and me sit here and watch the game? That would be great.

Molly Atwell

After the Storm

When my grandmother visited that year, she looped an old wooden rosary over my bedpost. “You might need it,” she said darkly; she didn’t bother to explain herself, and I was left to imagine vampires kneeling by my bed to say their prayers. But she was right, I did need it: the warm regularity of the beads slipping between my fingers, the crucifix clutched in my hand like a loaded gun. It wasn’t long before I developed a Jesus Welt on my palm, a small hole almost the exact tone and color of scabbed-over stigmata.

With the rosary close by, I usually slept straight through to morning, but there were never guarantees. The night Hurricane Cara came through, I was sitting up until three in the morning, mumbling the Hail Mary over and over, straining to hear under the wind and rain. Cara was just coming in from the South Carolina coastline; the kamikaze storm beat itself to death on the rise of our ridge. When I woke at five, in the morning dusk, it was to silence and the lingering smell of ozone. Still wrapped in sleep like cotton wool, I threw my legs over the side of the bed and stumbled to the window. The rain-wet pavement glowed with streetlight sheen; the sky was still gray, cautiously lightening. I wanted to stick my head out, to let the wind run over my skin and steam my eyes open, but the lock was stuck. I laid my cheek against the glass and made my breathing slow, calm, erratic. My father was snoring in the master bedroom, and I fought against that rhythm, the arrogant meter of his respiration.

I went first to my brother’s bedroom, across the hall from mine. He was lying sideways, sheathed in a cocoon of light summer blankets, his head tucked into the space between his shoulders. I had to put my hand on his chest to make sure he was breathing. When I touched him, electricity ran the length of his body; his eyelids fluttered, but he didn’t wake up.
Naomi Millan

Ritual

In the darkness beyond the bedroom window, the sea sighs, the steady wash of its deep voice blending with hers, “Mi Jesus tiene sueno, bendito sea, bendito sea...”

Her body is a gentle weight near the feet of her child. The mattress sags softly under the mother while the song flows from a warmth deep inside her, as green and lush as the island night.

The lullaby, echoing the voices of every woman ever to softly usher her child to sleep, floats onto the night air, expanding like cactus flowers towards the sky.

Her voice curls around her daughter permitting only a faint lick of wind to touch the cream of her skin. After she leaves, the song remains, collected around her daughter’s head, softly burning like a star.

(Macy sets up the television as we hear the play-by-play tune in. Macy sits down in a chair and opens a bag of chips. He begins to crunch loudly as the announcer’s voice is crisply articulating the action. Macy watches entranced. Peter looks bored.)

Macy: Now this is what I call bonding.

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