

## Eyes of Sea and Earth

By Rachel Cicoria

Beckoned by the royal palms, I stop. Lifting face to sun I lose myself in the rhythms of their stillness:

*Grass, hair, and fronds  
weave,  
warm breeze caressing  
calloused elbows  
and weathered skin  
of palms.  
In thick embrace  
of salty air,  
wings and hearts  
beat;  
edges recede.*

A car door slams and silence shatters. I am reassembled, brought back to this leaden body, this skin that feels only vacancy at the heart of touch.

---

In his rush to reach me, my father ran over a neighbor's dog, killing it. He stopped long enough to apologize to the family gathered around the limp, white body: "I am so sorry. But we need to get to the hospital. Our daughter just tried to kill herself."

I imagine him standing there, shrouded by the purple and amber hues of a Southwest Florida twilight sky, saying:

"We don't see our daughter much anymore. She stopped living at home a few years ago."

"Our Bunny Girl. She used to climb into the cage with the family rabbit. When it died, we told her that someone had left the cage door open, that it had escaped. She cried, wondering if it was her fault."

"Lost once at the beach. We found her later, our daughter—blanket in hand, thumb in mouth, toes in sand—sitting on a piece of driftwood and staring out across the ocean."

"My daughter. She inherited my love of trees, delighting in bark scraping skin, arms wrapped around trunks, the taste of the sky. To this day, chainsaw whines and sawdust sighs unearth

memories of riding shotgun in my pickup truck, of cradling in palms baby squirrels rescued from felled trees.”

“Our daughter, who, this afternoon, submerged herself in sunlight before going inside to die.”

“Our daughter.”

---

I cradle two pills in my palm. Desire for dissolution, lingering at the threshold of actuality, leaps to life with a swallow.

41 times, I repeat this process.

42 times, touching fingertips to lips, I sign “thank you.”

42 times, with kisses caught by no one, I gesture farewell.

As I close my eyes, 42 pairs of pills grant me sanctuary.

---

We have almost the same irises, my four younger siblings and I. Stormy greenish blue, textured with peaks of golden yellow, encircled by dark navy—a folding of my father’s aqua eyes into my mother’s hazel.

Ours are eyes of sea, of sun, of moss adorning tree bark. Of diamonds scattered across the surface of the ocean, as if cast there by the gods. Of the mangrove forests where I go to fish with my father in silence, where we are serenaded by lapping water and the eerie melodies of fishing line stroked by wind.

But, unlike my siblings, in my right eye, a mud-tinged bloom of orange furls upward. A bit of my mother asserting herself in me.

Mine are also eyes of earth, of sand—millennia in the making—into which toes curl. Of mud beneath fingernails, of baseball clay, of sediment swirled up by the fanning of a snook’s tail, of the dirt we dig to bury our beloved.

---

Charcoal drips from my lips, splashing into the red plastic bucket I clutch against my stomach. Above its rim, over illuminated by the cold lights of the ER room, my parents appear—disheveled and wide-eyed. When I meet their gaze, their panic cuts through my haze like a razor.

Hit by another wave of nausea, we witness desire turn inside out. I let the weight of their blue and hazel eyes drag me down into the sea of black, where I am alone with swimming shame and charcoal-covered-guilt.

My siblings are brought to the hospital after I am transferred from the ICU, once acute liver failure no longer looms on the horizon. Told I am “just exhausted,” the youngest are confused. Their saline gazes sting. But one brother, closest to me in age, sees through the lie. From the way his raging eyes pierce mine, I know that he knows what the acetylcysteine in the IV bag is for. He knows that it treats an acetaminophen overdose. We both know that it brings no relief.

---

I sit on the beach, on a ridge where piled shells crumble into fragments. Some of them are new here, edges pristine and whole, colors vibrant. My favorites are the porous ones, those halfway between being washed ashore and returning to the sea. I have learned to love our textures, traces, and new openings.

Small creatures scuttle and snail across the pink and gray mud that yawns between waves and sand. I contentedly turn a dissolving Murex shell over in my hands as I watch them. Soon, the water will return and busy tracks will wash away. Soon, the sea will stretch her fingers back toward this pile of shells, intent to transform us through rhythms only she knows.

---

From the other side of the house, my uncle cries out, his panic pressing the edges of silence. My cousins, siblings, and I rush to the scene, and, since I was once a veterinary technician, I am ushered outside. My father, once an EMT, is already there.

Crouched in the rain beside his brother at the edge of an overflowing swimming pool, he performs chest compressions on a small, white body—my uncle’s geriatric dog. When I kneel down next to my father, he stops, turning to me:

“I think he’s gone.”

My fingers, met only by a damp, pulseless cold, confirm.

I help my father wrap the drowned dog in a towel. Together, we give the bundle to my weeping aunt and uncle, draping our arms around their shoulders. As we shroud their grief with our skin, my father looks at me. And in the rain, beneath the ashen summer sky—ten years after his regretful form stood outlined in fading purples and amber—his daughter meets his gaze and holds it.

---

**Rachel Cicoria, who hails from Pine Island, Florida, is a graduate student in philosophy at Texas A&M University.**

---

© 2023 *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*