

Forgotten Hues

White walls and zero gravity welcome me each night as I drift into my subconscious. Years ago, I relished in the honeyed greens and tantalizing violets that visited me in the blackest hours of the night. Now, the once beautiful hues have been stripped from my dreams, leaving them naked, exposed, like me. In these dreams, I am blinded by the bleached nothingness as I float, unable to anchor myself to this reality. Everything I touch floats up, up, up beyond the stratosphere of my imagination. The worst part of these dreams is that no matter what happens in them, I am always entirely, utterly alone.

I stand by the windowpane now, attempting to look past the clear gray eyes reflecting back at me. Wild honeysuckle encroaches upon the thickets of briars in a garden that hasn't felt the love of tender hands in almost a decade. The flower beds are a depressing scramble of weeds and disagreeable vines, strangling each other to their inevitable deaths.

Yet the massacre of my beloved garden quickly fades as the man meanders down the cobblestone driveway. He thumbs through the stack of letters in his hands, then raises his head. Green eyes sweep over my abomination of a garden, and for a moment, I wonder if he likes to garden, too.

“Morning to ya, miss.”

I appear from behind the corner and slowly pad down the hallway towards the rickety screen door. Cream laced sleeves extend down each of my wrists, wisps of unruly dark hair curling around my temples. His eyes widen slightly when he sees me. Knuckles white from gripping my mail in anticipation, a small smile plays on his lips as he waits for me to step into the sweet summer air and take it from him. But as always, I don't take it, and as always, he waits

a bit too long, allowing the silence to mute his grin. Gently pushing the stack of papers through the slot near the bottom of the door, he straightens to meet my eyes. Lips parting slightly, I silently beg him to say anything other than his standard goodbye. Yet just as quickly, the lips seal shut, dimples surface in the form of a forced smile, the color drains from my vision, and the mailman returns to his truck having said nothing out of the ordinary.

Leafing through the electric bills, I wonder if he ever wonders why I never take the mail from him. I wonder if he did know, would it drive him away? I exhale heavily, slamming my forehead against the screen and wishing this reality wasn't as bleak as my dreams. How are you supposed to explain to a stranger that you're afraid to come out of your house? Every time I step outside, my blood roils and my thoughts collide and everything is too bright, too loud, too terrifying.

Tossing the bills on the counter, a stray index card sticks out of the corner of the pile. Cautiously lifting it, I flip it over to reveal perfectly cursive script.

"Dear Resident:" it reads.

"We have yet to be formally introduced, but I have a feeling that your garden used to be as beautiful as you are. Would you like some assistance tending to it?"

The following morning I hear the faint rumble of the mail truck outside, and once more, I stare past my reflection at a blue uniform striding towards the house. This time, when his foot creaks on the tired wood of the porch, I am waiting for him at the door. Before he can address me with his customary greeting, I blurt out "Yes, please."

His eyes crinkle at the corners, revealing years of laughter.

"I was hoping you would say that. I'll be by at four after I finish my route."

With that, he pushed the mail through the door once more, turned on his heel, and ambled back to the road.

Before jumping into the truck, he called over his shoulder, "I'm Harry, by the way."

' "I'm Lena," I mumble, but it's too late. The truck has already sputtered on to the next house.

The delicate metal hands of the clock indicate that he'll be here in two minutes. Sure enough, as I sit on my floor, head tilted against the screen, Harry appears on my doorstep with a bag full of garden tools.

"Where would you like me to start, miss?"

"By the honeysuckle, please. The flowers are so beautiful when they bloom in late June." He tilts his head to the side, mouth quirking up in a small smile. "Would you like to join me out here?"

"Oh, um, no thank you. I'm fine in here."

Un-phased, he nods and turns his back to me, walking over and caressing the petals with gentle fingers.

I remain on the floor next to the screen door, watching as his fingers expertly sort through the chaos. As the sun begins to melt into the treetops, he returns to the porch with picked flowers in his hands. He sits down on the other side of the screen door, looking at me intently.

"Did you know that if you separate the stem from the petals, you can drink the nectar from the flower?"

I smile as I watch him remove the flower from its stem, bring it to his lips, let the sweet honey slide down his throat.

"Here, you try."

An open palm beckons me to take the flower that rests in it, but I hesitate.

“You haven’t lived until you’ve had honeysuckle nectar. Trust me.”

I give a timid nod, then stand up and crack the screen door open. One foot slides forward, then the next, and before I realize what I’ve done, my skin is drinking in the sweet summer air next to a stranger. Harry rises, grinning at me like a little kid who just got an ice cream cone.

“You know you look much better out here than behind that screen,” he tells me while he rises, never breaking eye contact.

“Here.” Pulling the flower away with ease, he lifts the stem up to my mouth and tilts it towards my blushing face. I part my lips slightly, allowing the nectar to flow into my mouth. As it glides down my throat, the honeyed greens and tantalizing violets reappear, alighting my eyes with the hues that were almost forgotten.