

Stella

by Elizabeth Kate Switaj

It was never this warm down where I was born from an excess arm. Or maybe I was wanted. As an arm, I mean. I could have been shed defensively, though I don't know who would eat anything as spiny as my species. Of course I don't know what would eat me; I have not been devoured. Instead, I was netted and brought to this garden. I am safe from predators, if we have predators.

Sometimes I try to lose my arm, to startle a lazy sea cucumber or make an anemone contract the way children do—and laugh—with filthy fingers. I wouldn't laugh. I'm no better than the kids who lift me, too, into the air. It's just the hydraulics that let me move myself, my food, my breath do not have a facility for giggles. I cannot even speak this.

How do you record what flashes in the nervous ring that surrounds my mouth?

Do you?

I suppose I have to take on faith that someone's got my words. I'm not a crown of thorns. I don't eat polyps. I'm not brittle. I don't inhabit the abyss, or the tropics. These are things I've learned from the docents who loom above this garden and sometimes hold me so the little ones can stroke me.

Somehow I never remember my specific name. I'm a star. Maybe you can tell me more.

