

The Bricks

by Jamie Iredell

A graph of mud and straw and calloused hands. Fingers like worms inching through soil and kneading out mortar. He'd cased them. They: these worn-handed workers who walled themselves, by his—the king's—order. He ordered a palace built, and the builders came to blows, which is why the father's eyes have swollen shut, and the oldest son's knuckles are bright plums. The mother and two daughters (their saliva running thread-like from the seams of their mouths and pooling between their legs as tiny lakes, as spools of saliva-thread) stare, their eyes whiter, for their rags have browned as brown as their skin, which is black. Black shadows cast from the walls, which are symbols of their lives and of their class, as the walls shadow them and everyone beyond the walls, and the entire kingdom, even him—the king—who as far as he can tell has been unsuccessful at cutting away his own shadow. His heels have scarred and he's lost every toe, and where the toes once were now skin smooth like a burn victim's skin would shine if there were sunlight. But he stares at his walls, though he himself has not been walled, and he wishes he could hide its shadow, for he forgot in his manic walling to wall himself. Within a wall there are only shadows and so there aren't any shadows at all.

