

Rescue

by Katrina Dessavre

I wake up with the taste of mud in my mouth. Ashy, sulfurous, charred, with traces of rotten shellfish. I lick my teeth to rid my mouth of grit but it's useless. I try to spit but ever time I open my mouth it only fills with more mud.

I have one memory: water rushing me onto rocks, their jagged edges piercing my palms, a pounding on my back. The fear of waves pulling me back, propelling me forward, one hand, then the other, while my legs fall limp behind me. Then darkness.

When I wake again the world is quiet. My body lies slack. I lift my head just enough to turn it sideways but my eyelids are still glued together by mud. I can't find my arms or legs to tell them to move. I begin to wonder if my head is all that's left of me.

I hear voices. One high-pitched, rapid, the other lower, sharper. I try to make out words, phrases, but the vowels seem stuck to each other. It must be the mud in my ears, I think. Another voice appears, this one smoother, female.

I feel a sensation, touch, next to my face. Warm against cold, another hand gripping my arm and pushing me into myself. Sharp pain my back, then more sensations down my legs. I exhale sharply and inhale the ocean. Still char and ash and shellfish, but now more salt and freshness.

The same three voices, overlapping. A strong tug in my elbows while my heels drag against the ground. Smooth and liquid, with the occasional bump that reminds me of what pain feels like. I smile though I do not know if the edges of my mouth move upwards.

I feel my body come to a stop. I want to stay seated but fall backwards, face-up. Metal clinks somewhere nearby. Feathers brush up against me, though not my own. The voices fade away, replaced by clucking and wings beating against air. Eventually they diminish and all I can hear are waves lapping somewhere in the distance. I lie there all night, fading in and out of consciousness as the back of my

head, the only exposed part of my body, feels the occasional stab of cold air.

The earth warms up towards morning. More feathers rustle against me. More clucking, this time punctured by the cock's song. Metal clinks again and the low, sharp voice brings back more stuck-together vowels.

Without warning, water hits me from above, again, and again. The mud around my eyes softens. I blink them open.

Three faces stare at me through a wire fence. Around me chickens hide in alcoves that line the edges of the cage.

I spit and spit and spit until my tongue is dry.

I ask for water.

I tell them about the waves pushing me onto rocks.

I tell them my name is...it's...

I can't think of it but it doesn't matter. They look at me with the same wide eyes and give me back their words, almost familiar but still incomprehensible. ?

