Perhaps It'd Be Better If This Were In a Sandbox

by Lauren Belski

I'd been sleeping on a couch. It was the couch of another artist, a friend, the kind of friend who makes you want to think in star patterns that dance across galaxies and warm distant life forms that are impossible to see.

This friend made me feel more like myself than I do when I'm alone, because I knew he knew exactly what I was trying to say about everything before I said it, he understood that we needed to move the way the Pilgrims did, but that the world was getting smaller.

We both agreed. People were getting fatter and vintage clothes were difficult to zipper and button up. And it was getting harder to tell the difference between spray-on tans and skin. And hand cut fries versus the machine kind. And micro beers—are they all actually owned by big beer companies? And are craft beers made from genetically modified hops? And guns, should we own them? There might be someone trying to kill us.

We'd talked until our voices croaked. Then we made tea with honey and surfed the internet for a movie, watched one, and then put on another, to which I fell asleep.

But before I fell asleep, when the second movie was starting and I was busy contorting myself under a blanket that was a bit too small, I watched the character do something stupid. She said something that hurt someone's feelings, and I could tell it was because she felt self-conscious, and she reminded me of myself. I looked at the ceiling and noticed a discoloration in the shape of a boot heel.

Then I said to my friend, "You know, I always think I'm saying exactly how I feel to people, but afterwards I'm never sure. I wish I could see it happen. I wish every emotion could just be pressed into the sand."

"Like that poem about Jesus," he said.

"What?"

"The footprints thing."

"Maybe," I said, even though that wasn't exactly what I was getting at.

Then I slept. And I think the second movie infected my dreams.

In the middle of the night I woke up thinking about people I didn't want to—living ghosts from other lives I'd lived. People I'm not sure about—are they enemies or did we just lose touch? Do they care about me? Do they remember me fondly the way I remember them? I saw them the way I'd seen them in the sleep world, all their faces one face, like in that Michael Jackson video—their mouths moving, shifting, colliding into one another like they were saying something, one thing, but now that I was awake in this room that wasn't mine at a dark indiscernible hour, it was more a feeling than a word, and whatever the word was couldn't have been a good thing because I felt nervous about it, not to mention all alone.

I thought about walking up the stairs and waking up my friend and asking, "Do you think that I'm good?"

But what kind of answer would he give me? I only wanted a yes.

The ghosts were watching me. I could feel their eyes. I reached to the floor and found my ipod. I tried to drown out their collective voices by putting my songs on shuffle. But I have terrible news. It turns out every song ever written in the catalog of human kind is about these living ghosts.

What a bummer. I closed my eyes. The couch was short and my feet dangled over the end of it out the bottom of the blanket. It was then I discovered that my throat was dry.

I bumbled through the dark to the kitchen and turned on the faucet of the sink and filled an empty coffee cup with water. I drank like a girl who'd been walking through the desert on a vision quest.

I'll be a better person, I told myself. I won't go anywhere. I can be a Pilgrim in my apartment I suppose.

The water tasted like pipes. In my mind I followed them back to a water tower, imagining it full of smiling starfish.