

As Pleat

by Nicolette Wong

He stands waiting where the ground splits, a skating azure seeping through the blinds. Sleepers' souls are turning into cubes, pressed into shape by walls slowly moving in. As the houses exhale, his eyelids start to burn like granite tears on the pavement. He will not pick them up—he has waited too long and lost the strength to bend.

In twilight he opens his hand to show me a piece of stone. It has his face, then mine; then it glows and sings his palm. The lines disappear and he has no more fate to follow, only flesh.

“Is it your stone?” I ask.

“No, it's yours,” he says. “Now take me home.”

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Every night I crave the gun in my stomach. When he sat beside my carmine drapes, his face tattered by shadows, I wanted to butcher myself to pull the trigger. Only then would he know the turmoil I lived and still live.

I have not seen him again.

After the storm I hit the rooftop to tear dead leaves off the plants. I inherited them from the ghost couple who haunted the place, until they ran out of songs to keep the plants happy. I pace in muted songs and hold the plants when they avert their eyes.

Raindrops are dripping from bamboo sprawling to shield.

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His words drift above concrete, taxis speeding into neon lanes and last shards of the night, to breathe a mechanical glow around my ear. I see him vaporize into a vodka haze on the windshield. Then smoke, shattered glass, and his car floating to exit the scene.

“I wanted to hear your voice,” he says. “Maybe this is a better way to go.”

How can I tell him he is not deserted, when he is?

I turn up the music and slip into drone, rock it like a tunnel in canary. When that does not erase his face, I cup my breast with one hand and let my hair fall.

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I made the photo black and white and sent it with a note: "Let's go to the seaside."

He waits for me beneath a gloomy sky. It starts to drizzle as I take my shoes off to sit on a rock. The surf chases, breaks and washes over our feet. He presses his palm against the rock for a moment to steady himself. In the rain his eyes are black emeralds. I hold my breath.

"Have you been to a beach of stones?" he asks.

"No. It'd be nice to see."

"It'd be a lot for you to see. I can take you—"

"No," I say. "Don't name it."

