

# Garter

Kayleb Rae Candrilli

In summer we worked the farm share. We plucked weeds and planted carrots until our shoulders blistered with sunburns. We caked our hands so heavy with dirt that, for those long days, our lifelines and fingerprints were filled up, skin worked smooth by earth. When we finished the farm head would lead us down into the barn and fill crumpled plastic bags with greens, veggies, sometimes a jar of jam.

We always let the dirt on our hands linger as we filled the fridge's crisper drawer to brimming, spinach leaves big like geisha fans, bundles of kale, turnips, beets that we would turn into "chips," and asparagus that we never did wrap in bacon. But that crisper was full all summer; it looked like all the colors of a jungle we'd never been to.

That last day we spent at the farm it rained, so we worked in the greenhouses thick with humidity. Clearing a bed of rotted lettuce, you spotted a garter snake, larger than normal, two feet at least. You weren't scared; it seemed as if all you wanted was a closer look, for me to catch it, and present its rhinestone scales to you. I pinned its head in the soil, let its silver body wrap my wrists like a too tight bracelet. You smiled at me, dragged one careful finger along its slick head. And that was it. I let it go.

So now that summer's long over, I think I should tell you, that snake was no garter but a cottonmouth, the kind that can kill you, or take a hand or an arm or leg. And when I open my empty crisper drawer its fangs sink deep into my skin like they should have that day—venom spreading because the growing season's long over.

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