

Brenna Womer

Two Week Guarantee

I picked up a chunk of turquoise from a velvet-lined case, smoothed a thumb over its surface and thought of Dickinson chiding her honest fingers after a noontday nap under the pines, under an oak, under the Bodhi Tree like Siddhartha. The Navajo man, shirtless, wearing a squash blossom necklace and crude tattoos with aged blue ink, dressed as a cowboy, dressed as a chief, dressed like my father, said, “Turquoise is the protector stone. It was tradition for Indian warriors to wear it on hunts and into battle. But it is not an excuse to be reckless—it only protects up to 50 miles per hour.”

Stuck in traffic next to an aqua blue, '61 Chevy Biscayne, two boys in the back—brothers, no more than a year or two apart. No seat belts, maybe lap belts, and Dad in the driver's seat. His hair greasy, long and blonde. His left hand gripped the steering wheel at 12 o'clock, right arm stretched along the back of the bench seat, empty. Mom at home making deviled eggs, Mom laid up in bed with another migraine, Mom long gone. Out for a Saturday drive, picking two books each at the library for smarts, searching out four-leaves in the clover field for luck, digging arrowheads at the quarry for courage. Experiences paid for with hours spent and the gas it took to get there.

On my way to work I'd drive by a sprawling tree in the front yard of an antique, two-story house. At night I walked my dog on the sidewalk beneath it; there was a streetlight lost in its limbs. The green leaves glowed orange from the light, but in the fall when the leaves were orange too, I'd lie down on the ground beneath and look up into the still, cold fire. The dog sat next to my head, her haunch warm against my ear, alert because suddenly she was the taller one. One morning I drove by and it was felled, the fire tree, cut into rounds. It was dead inside, rotted out and hollow.

The tiny woman whispered to herself as she trimmed my cuticles, but the whisper, barely audible, was not meant to be a whisper, was meant to be heard and was heard by the woman two stations down sanding acrylics. The tiny woman did not look me in the eye as she massaged my forearms with lavender lotion, did not look me in the eye when she took my credit card or brought it back with the receipt, did not look me in the eye until I told her I liked her bracelet.

“Jade?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said, and smiled.

But the bracelet was so small, barely wider than her wrist, a solid circle with no clasp. She could never take it off, not with shampoo or butter or baby oil. I asked her where she got it.

“My mother gave to me when I was eight year old,” she said.

She had grown into the bracelet, the arm inside once a sapling now a tree. To age a tree you have to cut it open and count the rings. To remove the bracelet I’d have to cut through her arm or cut through the bracelet. Sawing, wood dust; sanding, nail dust.

“You want shellac?” she asked. “It last two week, guarantee.”