

OCTAVIA'S BROOD:
SCIENCE FICTION STORIES FROM SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

Alison
Thank you for
your work! And
smiling face xoxo
J

edited by
Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown

Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements

edited by Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown

ISBN 978-1-84935-209-3 | Ebook ISBN: 978-1-84935-210-9

Library of Congress Number: 2014958844

© 2015 Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown

This edition © 2015 AK Press and the Institute for Anarchist Studies

Cover design and chapter opener illustrations: John Jennings

Melanie Hardy illustrated the map on page 56 to accompany "The Long Memory"

Alix Garcia supplied illustrations for "In Spite of Darkness"

Interior Design by Margaret Killjoy (birdsbeforethestorm.net)

Printed in the USA on recycled, acid-free paper.

AK Press

674-A 23rd Street

Oakland, CA 94612

www.akpress.org

akpress@akpress.org

510.208.1700

AK Press UK

P.O. Box 12766

Edinburgh EH8 9YE

www.akuk.com

ak@akedin.demon.co.uk

0131.555.5165

Institute for Anarchist Studies

www.anarchiststudies.org

anarchiststudies@gmail.com

To Octavia E. Butler, who serves as a north star for so many of us. She told us what would happen—"all that you touch you change"—and then she touched us, fearlessly, brave enough to change us. We dedicate this collection to her, coming out with our own fierce longing to have our writing change everyone and everything we touch.

wind itself. I looked up toward the burning sky and from the smoke appeared Jaiku. He was fa-a-a-a-r away from me, flying on a half-opened seed.

"Did the seed look like this?" Ó drew the shape of a canoe with a tall sail protruding from the middle of it.

"Yes, mama! Just like that! This part was a beautiful color, blue but—" She tried to think what to compare it to. She had only known color by the light of fire, so all color had a warmth to it that her dreams sometimes did not possess.

"Was the blue softer?"

"It was a strong blue. Cooler, I guess. And this part was white but much brighter," she said pointing to the sail.

"Was there anything else?"

"When Jaiku appeared, the ground began to shake, a silent shaking that stirred the spirits within. I saw thousands of them lift upward and all at once come for me."

"Sleep now, Mikra, you will need your strength. We have a long journey ahead of us."

That very night Ó prepared her birds for flight. She opened the turtle-like shell that rested on her back and hundreds of birds flew out, leaving behind a trail of glittering light that cut through the darkness. She opened her arms and threw white powder up into the heavens as they flew in circles above her. She spoke with thunder in her voice.

"Tell Jaiku to come."



HOLLOW

MIA MINGUS

WEST WAS ALMOST DONE WITH HER SHIFT WHEN SHE HEARD THE loud sound of the long buzzer. Walking out into the hall with her cane, she could see the flashing orange lights, signaling a new Arrival was in the hatch. It had been almost fifty years since West first started working at the hatch and still, each time the buzzer rang, she could feel her heart beat a little faster. Her steps quickened, and she hurriedly entered the receiving room. Counting down the seconds, she leaned her cane against the shelf behind her and stood waiting for the small light next to the opening handle to turn from red to green.

After a few minutes, the light changed colors, and West firmly grabbed the handle on the large door and turned it with one quick motion, releasing it and sliding it upward. Inside she could see the large oval vessel just beyond the door. Slowly she unlatched the bottom of the hatch and pulled, sliding it out, so that the vessel sat directly waist-high in front of her. Locking it in place, she retrieved a key from the wall and inserted it into the hole at the top of the vessel. Then she returned the key to its place as circular lights lit up around the keyhole, and a moment later the top half of the vessel slid open, revealing its contents.

West reached in and pulled out a thick bundle of white blankets showing only the tiny face of the sleeping baby inside. West smiled down at the infant, gently pulling back the blankets and softly touching the infant's cheeks. West breathed a deep sigh of relief. This one had made the long journey from Earth. It was still alive and breathing peacefully. She hugged the baby close to her, rocking it slightly from side to side.

A new Arrival.

The door opened behind her and West turned to see Seva greet her with a smile.

"A new one?" Seva asked.

"Just came in." West opened her arms so Seva could see the baby. Seva peered in quietly at the sleeping face and sighed.

"Here," West offered. "You take the little one. I'll clean up in here. I was about to leave anyway." She handed Seva the baby and opened the door for her. As she turned to begin cleaning up, she could hear Seva softly singing to the infant as she made her way down the hall, her small voice echoing as the door closed. West smiled to herself. Seva had such a sweet spot in her heart for the Arrivals.

West began to gather the extra blankets that had fallen to the floor. Leaning on her cane, she pulled them up before she noticed the envelope sticking out from between the cloth. She froze as her breath caught in her chest. Putting the blankets down, she picked up the envelope, a cautious look on her face. They had never, in all their time here, received a communication in any of the vessels.

She sharply examined the envelope, flipping it over in her hands. It was from Earth, addressed to the General. After glancing back at the closed door, West quickly opened the envelope, pulled out a letter, and read it, then reread it.

"No, it can't be," she whispered. Her mind raced as she tucked the letter in her pocket and quickly finished cleaning up.

• • •

Ona ran her hands under the warm water of the faucet, trying to wash the dirt off. Her arms and hands were sore from working in the garden all day, and she knew it would only get worse later that night. Al Dwhin was still bringing in the day's harvest, buckets of vegetables to be used for the week. Prolt wasn't far behind him, pulling a small wagon of tools and supplies behind his chair. Al Dwhin grunted as he bent down to unhook the wagon with his big hand.

"You need something for the pain?" Ona asked, wiping her hands on a nearby towel.

"Nah, I'm okay. I just need to soak later tonight. I tell you, my

muscles aren't what they used to be." Al Dwhin stretched his tall body and rubbed his lower back with his big hand, scratching his forehead with his little arm.

Ona wet a washcloth with warm water and brought it over to Prolt, helping him wipe off the dirt from his hands and arms. Ona searched for places where dirt had mixed with his drool and hardened to form a crust. When he was done, she looked down at him. "Knee and hip?" she asked.

He nodded and smiled, "Knee and hip."

Ona bent down and adjusted his knee, picking it up and pushing to the left. "Better? She asked. "Better. Much better," he answered, relieved.

"You know you should have told me when we were in the garden and I could have done it there," she reminded him for the millionth time.

"Yeah, but I didn't want to make you get up from your new method. Plus, you'd get my knee all dirty with your muddy hands." Prolt looked at her sharply with a half smile and laughed, catching some of his drool with his wrist. Ona smiled at him, shaking her head, knowing he had probably been in pain for the last hour although he had not said anything.

"Ha ha," she said, lightly elbowing his shoulder. He laughed.

"So did it work out better today?" Al Dwhin called over from the sink where he was finishing up. "Less pain?"

"A little," Ona answered. "My legs don't hurt anymore, but it's too hard holding myself up with my arms all day. Maybe I could ask Wild if she could build me a kind of little bench or something? Something similar to the one she made for Rex?"

"Mm-hmm, let's ask her tonight at dinner. I think she could get you one by tomorrow afternoon." Al Dwhin raised his eyebrows knowingly at Ona and Prolt. "If she's in a good mood."

Ona laughed quietly and shook her head. "At that rate, I'll be waiting forever."

Prolt expertly backed his chair up to the large metal wagon filled with the food and some flowers. Al Dwhin secured the full baskets and crates so they wouldn't topple over on their ride back while Ona connected the wagon to the hitch on the back of Prolt's chair. Once

finished, she carefully maneuvered herself onto the small empty space that had been left for her on the wagon. She reached over and held the bucket of flowers on her lap as Prott began to pull out of the shed, with Al Dwhin walking ahead to open the large doors of the biosphere.

• • •

Rex sat still, staring down at the letter after having read it. West watched her, patiently waiting. Rex felt like the earth beneath her feet had fallen out from under her.

"Have you shown this to anyone else?" Rex's rough hands carefully folded the piece of paper back along its creases, laying it on the table between them.

"No, I came straight here. Seva was with me, but she didn't see it. She's still back at the receiving center. Do you think it's real? Do you think they're coming?"

"It's real. It was with an Arrival. It can't be anything else." Rex ran her hands over her hair and thought for a moment. "It says they sent word through the system. I wonder how long ago that was."

"There's no way to tell. Holdan broke the system soon after the last one of them died. There's no fixing it or getting it back. He made sure of it."

"Damn, Holdan," Rex sighed. "Can we get one of the Arrivals to work on it and try to fix it? Maybe they could also find out if there have been other messages sent."

West paused. "I can ask, but what would we tell them it is? Won't they ask? We can't tell them the truth."

"I don't know. We can tell them whatever we have to. We just need it done. It's our only way to find out more about this letter. If there are messages there, we need to know what they say."

West nodded her head and paused. "But why would they come here? And why now, after all this time? What could they want?"

Rex lowered her eyes, shook her head, and spoke slowly, almost as if she were talking to herself. "I don't know. I just don't know. Once the Arrivals started to come, I just assumed that was the end of it. But maybe it was just the beginning."

West was quiet. When she spoke next, her words were almost a whisper. "They think we're dead—or worse. This message was clearly meant for the General. They have no idea we're alive and the rest of them are gone. When they find out what has happened," she leaned forward, "They will kill us."

"We can't think about that now. We don't know why they are coming, but we have to be prepared, and our only hope is to try and retrieve the messages they sent from the system. There's got to be a way."

West raised her head, pulling herself out of the whirlpool of thoughts racing through her mind. Exhaling deeply, she said, "Okay. I can ask tomorrow."

"Good. And for now, we don't say a word to anyone." Rex looked at West.

West held Rex's gaze and nodded. Steadying herself on her cane, West rose from her chair and began to limp away. At the door, she stopped and turned her head toward Rex.

"When we do decide to tell the rest of them, you have to be the one to tell Wild." West paused for a moment, before leaving.

Letting out a long breath in the dim light, Rex sighed, now alone. "I know."

• • •

"In the beginning, it was supposed to be a punishment," Rex began slowly. "It was the best solution the Perfects could come up with: send the cripples away. They couldn't bear to look at us, but they couldn't bring themselves to continue killing us. UnPerfects, they used to call us—U.P.s." She trailed off, staring into the fire, not moving, breathing slowly. "I don't know. Must've been something in their souls. Call it guilt, call it instinct, call it morals, but they couldn't do it. Believe me, they tried. They killed most of us, but something didn't sit well with them about it. I think it was the children that finally did them in. They couldn't keep killing their own, but they couldn't keep or raise them either. So they came up with this," she motioned with her arm. "They sent us here to die."

"Wasn't no children, it was Jay Lu," Wild interjected gruffly from her chair. "If it wasn't for him, we'd all be dead, like we should. Was

his daddy that put a stop to it. Those men would've kept on shooting and injecting us and dragging us out to the Fields for the birds to finish us off if his darlin' little baby boy hadn't been born. I was waiting for my turn and that damned baby had to come spilling out of his mother like a goddamned alarm."

"Wild." Al Dwhin's voice was disapproving as he furrowed his brow.

"What?" Wild challenged, looking squarely at Al Dwhin. "I was ready. We was *all* ready. We was all prepared and ready, goddamn it. If it hadn't been for him, it all would have ended then and there like it should have, and we never would have ended up here in this mess about to lose everything again, everything we've worked so hard for. We all know it was Jay Lu and his high-powered daddy."

Wild paused, shaking her head and frowning. "Jean shouldn't have been there." She trailed off, slowly curling in on herself. The room fell silent.

Ona turned back to Rex.

Rex kept her eyes on the fire. She hadn't heard Wild talk about Jean in a very long time. No one had. It was like being pulled back into another time. Suddenly, clear as day, Rex could see Jean throwing her arms around Wild, the two of them smiling and laughing, gazing at each other. She could see Jean passionately hunched over the dining room table late into the night, mapping strategies and plans with markers and pens. She could hear Jean yelling, refusing to leave the rest of the U.P.s, defiantly resisting the surrounding soldiers, and Wild looking up at her, pleading with her to go. The air had been thick with smoke and screams, as thousands of soldiers carted U.P.s away by the truckload to the camps to be burned, tortured, killed. No one knew at that time, but they were certain they weren't coming back.

Jean was one of the hundred or so Perfects who didn't run. There had been thousands of Perfects there that night who had fled once the trucks showed up, but not Jean. She stayed and was taken to the camps alongside Wild and the rest of them. Beaten and raped like everyone else, she endured the camps for the three weeks they were all there. She was shot and taken out to the Fields minutes before the order came down to halt the killings.

Wild was set to die that day as well, but it never happened. She screamed for them to kill her too, all day and into the nights that wore on as they all sat in agonizing anticipation of what was going to come next. Right up until they loaded her onto the rocket bound for Hollow, Wild tried to die.

The orders had been swift and firm, from the head of the New Regime himself: everyone in the camps was to be shipped off to Hollow. Two hundred soldiers would accompany them. For what, no one knew.

Rex had only ever heard of Hollow as an experiment, as a new planet they were hoping to make inhabitable. There had been talk at one point that the regime would send all the criminals there to be quarantined and die, but everyone knew the regime needed the free labor in the prisons too much to send their criminals away.

In those days, none of the U.P.s knew what was to come. Would they be unloaded and killed there? Would they be tortured? Experimented on? Or simply left to starve and die in their own filth?

The six of them in that room had organized together for years, heading up much of the leadership of the U.P.s before they were taken to the camps. And their bonds remained strong, as many of the other U.P.s on Hollow looked to them for answers and guidance. They had all met working to free U.P.s from violent institutions to join the mass movements that were happening, laid down strategy and plans for their communities, and provided shelter and support to more U.P.s than they could name, who were being abandoned and hunted by the Perfects. They had lost many on their team, hard blows to their spirits, but they knew they had to keep moving on. They owed it to their departed teammates and to each other to keep moving toward the world they believed was possible.

The sound of Ona's voice stopped Rex's thoughts. "Who is Jay Lu?" she asked.

West interrupted loudly. "Well, we should head to bed. It's getting late and we have a long day tomorrow. Come on," she urged, nudging Ona's shoulder from above. Ona sighed and got up slowly, leveraging her weight from side to side until she was steadily on her feet.

"You too," West ordered the other Arrivals who had been quietly listening.

The Arrivals offered good-nights to the room and left. West followed them to the door and closed it behind them, turning quickly on her cane.

"What are you all doing?" she demanded. "Telling them everything? Telling them now will only make it harder when we have to leave."

"What are you talking about? They asked, and they deserve to know. They *need* to know," Prolt responded.

"It's true," Al Dwhin began. "After all, they came to us. They're old enough to hear about it all. It's where they came from. Plus, we don't know what's going to happen. We may not be here that much longer."

West was firm. "The letter said we had six months. That's plenty of time to—"

"We don't know if that's true," Rex interrupted. "The Perfects can change their minds anytime and do what they please, as we've all seen. They could send more tomorrow, and we wouldn't be able to stop them. Shit, we don't even know where we are. We don't have any more time. We have to move fast, and that includes getting the Arrivals ready. We need them. We're not as young as we used to be, and we can't do this on our own."

West softened and looked with defeat from Rex to Al Dwhin to Prolt. "But they are so young. I just—I ... I just don't want them to get hurt," she said as she sank into a nearby chair, letting her cane drop to the floor.

"They don't know what it was like. And how do we tell them? Even if we do, there's no way to get them to understand. How do you teach a history of hate in the name of love? How can we warn them of what kind of monsters they might have to face? How do we tell them what the camps were like? Do we tell them of it all? Jean screaming in the next cell over, Ashlin begging for his life, still alive after the injection to see the birds eating his flesh? The way they just disposed of us and piled us dead in the Fields. Like we were some kind of garbage, like human waste. Sometimes I can still hear the sound of those damn crows, and it haunts me." West hung her head, her face buried in shadow.

The room was heavy with silence, everyone drenched in memories of another world.

Al Dwhin was the first to move slowly across the circle, coming to kneel next to West, dropping his tall body to the floor. "I know," he said in a soft, knowing voice, filled with all the weight of their past. He gently moved his little arm under hers and she caressed it as she collapsed against him.

"We have to tell them," Prolt said, wheeling closer, lowering his voice. "We have to tell them all of it, even if it is hard. It's the only way for us to be able to save Southing if that letter is true."

"But where will we go? We haven't come up with anything yet. And the thought of starting all over again—" West trailed off.

Wild spoke up in her deep scratchy voice. "We will go towards the edge of the red sky to look for Holdan, Nuroh, Elda, and the rest of the U.P.s. It's our only hope. If we can find them, we might be able to come back and fight."

"Leave? You can't be serious." Prolt looked at Wild incredulously. "Southing is our home. We built it into what it is. We transformed it and poured our hearts into this city. We can't just abandon it. We have to stay and fight for it. And what about the rest of the U.P.s? We tell them they have to leave too?" Prolt snorted, shaking his head as he continued. "And besides, Holdan left years ago. I thought we were done with him. Even if he's alive, he doesn't deserve to be found. And if Nuroh and Elda's team had found him or any of the U.P.s that went with him, they would have come back and let us know. We don't even know what is beyond the red sky. There may not even be vegetation. How will we survive without the biospheres? You're going to lead a whole city of cripples across an unknown planet? There's no way. I'm not going to just give up my home to those bastards."

Wild had moved closer to the circle, and she held steady. "We can send a team out to go and look. We don't all have to leave. Some of us can stay here and guard Southing. The Arrivals are stronger and younger, far more mobile than most of us. They can scout the land and come back. We've dealt with the soldiers before, we can do it again."

"Separate?" West shook her head. "That is certain death. We can't separate. The only way we will make it is to stay together. The Arrivals are too young to go out alone with no water and food."

"Of course we will give them food and water to travel with. We will prepare them," Wild sternly pushed back.

"Nuroh, Elda, and the rest of them left five years ago. What's to say that the Arrivals will be able to come back in the next handful of months?" Prolt countered.

"And *we*? What do you mean, *we*? We haven't decided on anything yet." West turned to Rex, demanding answers.

"No one's decided anything yet," Rex said, raising her hands, looking directly at Wild, who was sitting up defiantly in her chair now. "But I haven't heard another suggestion of what we should do."

Everyone knew she was right. No one knew what to do, and even though Wild's idea was extreme, it was the only viable option they had heard. They all remembered the massacres and the camps. They all remembered Hollow before Southing. No one wanted to relive that, and it felt like an imminent future that none of them wanted to admit, let alone face. Rex was right: no one knew how long they had, and if the soldiers came before they were ready it would be too late.

Southing had become a home for so many of them, after such horror, that no one had thought it would end. After the initial batch of soldiers had been killed off, it felt like they were finally free from the Perfects. Finally able to live again. The work of transforming the stations they had been brought to into places they could inhabit with pride and ease felt like a way to heal from all they had suffered through. They built new adaptations for their chairs, lifts, canes, crutches, braces, and their UnPerfect bodies, without thought to what was allowed or having to rely on the Perfects to do so. They experimented with their wildest dreams and ideas, making pulleys and slides and inventing new tools. No one could imagine leaving.

• • •

Seva sat quietly on the couch, sadness running through her like a slow, steady river. Her heart hurt. She loved Southing, and the thought of leaving was enough to make her consider searching for Hōdan. She had never had a home like this, never lived somewhere with people who loved her. She could still remember her childhood spent at institutions after her parents had committed her and never returned. Being shuffled back and forth with no say, the beatings, the punishments, the meds, and the terrorizing silence. She had wanted

something so much better for their kind—they all had—and now it seemed so hopeless.

She was the youngest of three, born to Perfects, the only U.P. in her family. Her parents had tried to raise her for three years before finally giving up. After what seemed a lifetime of hoping they would visit, days spent sitting at the east-facing windows looking for any sign of them, she had reluctantly given up. They weren't coming back for her, and she would never see them again.

She didn't know where they were now and didn't care. Sometimes she thought about her sisters and wondered what her parents must have told them when they came home from school to find her gone. And the next days and weeks and years—what did they say?

The night she first met Al Dwhin and Rex, they had helped her escape from the institution. That night they had asked her if she had a family she wanted them to take her to, and without hesitation she said no. She told them to take her wherever they were going and that she wanted to help free other U.P.s too. She joined their revolutionary work and never looked back.

Working at the receiving center fed a part of her soul that had died at that east-facing window. Welcoming new U.P.s to Southing was a kind of tenderness she had never known. She felt for the Arrivals, traveling all that way from Earth as tiny babies, so far from where they came from, so full of questions. She knew what it was like to live with that kind of longing always at the back of your heart. But she also knew Southing was a far better experience than they would ever have had if they had been kept on Earth. She knew the other side, and it was impossible to tell them.

• • •

Dear U.P.s,

If you are reading this, you have survived too and we are waiting for you. Somehow, you have survived the soldiers' return to Southing. We never wanted to leave, but it was the only way. We couldn't stay; we had to leave to try and find a way to return. Southing was our home and one day it will be again.

There is no time left. The soldiers are coming and I fear we will not make it through this final battle. Tomorrow we leave for the other side of Hollow, towards the edge of the red sky in the hopes of finding other U.P.s, in hopes of surviving. It is our last attempt to save Southing and the world we have built here, the world the Perfects want to destroy.

My name is Ona and I am writing this to you from inside Southing. I am an Arrival and have lived in Southing all my life, from the moment I landed on Hollow as a baby sent from Earth, until tomorrow morning when I will leave for the first time.

I have been raised by the Earlies, who have taken me in, raised me and taught me everything I know. They are the architects of Southing and what it has come to be. They were all part of the last great revolution on Earth and were brought to Hollow as a punishment, as a last resort.

They have told me of their time on Earth and the glory days of the revolution when they thought they had won and the people finally seized the government, Perfects and UnPerfects working side by side for liberation. Wild tells of her chair rolling next to Jean's long strides, escaping the soldiers, taking each turn and alley in unison, moving with the wind and rain, instead of against it. And the quick backlash, when the revolution was broken and fell. When the New Regime took hold after just a week and forced the U.P.s into the camps, it killed them one by one before finally sending those still alive here.

They will never tell you this history, but I want you to know how the Earlies came to Hollow and built Southing into a land we could finally call our own. Free from the Perfects and Earth. I want you to know the magnificence of Rex as she swings and glides, twisting and turning on her crutches with such grace and strength. I want you to feel the tenderness of Seva's

heart, the determination of West and the warmth of Al Dwhin's smile.

Our history is all we have and the Perfects will work to erase it. Southing was never meant to be, and it must live on, it must never be forgotten. We will return here one day.

If the Perfects come and all is lost, remember these names: Rex, Wild, Seva, Jay Lu, Prolt, Al Dwhin, Nuroh, and West.

Follow the edge of the red sky and look for us. We will keep our eyes to the horizon for you.

*We will find each other and build Southing anew,
Ona*



CHILDREN WHO FLY

LEAH LAKSHMI PIEPZNA-SAMARASINHA

For Kumari Indigo Frances Piepzna-Samarasinha

KUNJU, YOUR MOM SAID SHE KNEW YOU WANTED TO BE BORN. SHE DIDN'T want you to be abused, but some things, they don't change, or they don't change enough. That's where you came in.

Kumari wakes up and watches her breath. The shack is made out of a thin layer of reclaimed cedar, rainbow layers of old wool sweaters staple-gunned to the inside of the walls to keep out the chill. Oakland in November 2032 is warmer than it used to be but still colder than anyone wants to admit, hot planet be damned, and East Bay folks still remain in denial that it is not always summer here because we live in California. She swings her legs off the side of the mattress, stands up and stretches. Reaches for some old black and pink ASICS and bends over to lace them up. They were her mom's. This was her mother's shack. Her mother died last year.

She pushes the double door open, steps out into a dew-wet, shaggy back garden. Fucking endless kale, sunflowers crisping in November, dry grass with lush roots above raised beds above the lead. Walks to the gate, then breaks into a run.

It was hard for the ancestors to think of dissociation as positive. Back in the day when Amma was around, back when she was a riot grrl sulky teenager in the nineties (the nineties!), everyone was still ashamed. They didn't even have words yet. Like disassociation? That's that thing that makes it so you can't feel it when you fuck? So you look at your leg and go that's my leg? What does that mean, it's my leg? Just some hunk of

meat down there. *Back when her mom was a kid-kid, they didn't even have those zines, those whispers, and folded pieces of paper. They had solid bodies of rage and trauma that never had a chance to be whisper-shouted out. Just got passed on.*

Amma was Generation One on the big butcher paper on the wall of the U.S. Social Forum 2010. You, kids, you are Generation Two.

Kumari pushes the gate open and starts trotting down Stuart Street. When the ocean rose, it stopped right at Sacramento, and, inshallah, the sea dikes and barriers and marvelous human-engineered ecosystems stay working, it means they are three short blocks from the beach. To run next to earth and sky and water, the smell of salt and oil, hunks of highway 80 poking up through the sea. The sharks that glint, come inland from the Farrallons, the ones that lived through nuclear warheads dropped and left for fifty years by a Navy sub. When she hits the crumbling street, its ruined gas station and liquor store, its gardens, she turns right and breaks into a faster run. She is late. Two blocks of crumbling pier ahead, her fam are waiting.

What happens when you are raped early and young? When your amygdala and cerebral cortex are still forming? When your lizard brain and limbic system are raw and open, still governing your body's choices? Instinct, smell, and memory. What happens when your pussy and cock are touched in a way that maybe breaks open that third eye into a canal you can escape through?

They call it the opening.

"Your Amma was a child of Oya, you know," Luis uncle said once, a couple months ago. They were sitting at the old dining room table in front of the janky ancestral altar, nonworking gas fireplace, and the "open hearted: love freely, love fearlessly" poster Kiran aunty made tacked above it. Ze stirred hir coffee at the old kitchen table. Hir eyes a galaxy, streaked with aging Fishnet shadow from a 2015 vintage Urban Decay palate. Lavender magenta over taupe golden streaks to the brow bone.

This table was old when Amma got it, when she moved into the house at thirty-four. She kicked the table. "I know. She used to say it all the time: 'Am I too old to roll my eyes?' Didn't she ever think it was culturally appropriative or something? Since she was Sri Lankan and white, not African?"

Luis gave an elegant shrug, looking away and sipping. "It was easier to get into orisha than to find some kind of diasporic Dravidian Hindu temple that was queer positive. She was always respectful of Kali, but she found some Luisah Teish book at the Buck-a-Book Barn in Worcester when she was ten, and she and Oya, they always had an affinity. She was a daughter of Oya and a Taurus. She'd always said that it was like being cosmically topped by the goddess all the time. 'No, wait, stop, mama! No more change! I've figured out the Method!' And Oya would put her hand on her hip and slap her around a little more, send her spinning. Whirling skirt don't play."

"I know all that."

Luis looked at her over the plate. "So when are you going to do something with it? You're her daughter."

Go up.

Your mom did all those somatics and trauma weekend intensives in the Bay in the early 2000s, back before so much horrible, back when friends of hers still had that exotic thing called jobs. The workshops that left you tender and spent, ripped open and new. Back when life was still on that cusp of bougie organizer. Broke but organic honey fig lavender ice cream in Rockridge and shit on your EBT. Back before more horrible things than you could imagine happened. Nuclear warheads going off under Antarctica, no salmon for a decade and a half, the beautiful, raging, dead ocean. You did all those courses and what you knew a little bit of in the women's therapy collective of El Cerrito in 2010—feeling warmth in your belly like tiger lilies smeared with yellow pollen from love and safety and sex, the stank meat-locker chill of cold blood when you leave through your left armpit—you know how to do it when you want to now. You close your eyes and envision those tiger lilies in your belly, the wet smell of that pond in Princeton, Massachusetts, nature sanctuary 1995, that secret Detroit river fold where you took your lover summer of 2012, yes, at the Allied Media Conference, sticky mango yellow tube top over browning humid skin, how happy you always were at that confluence of river bend, Rust Belt city, and revolutionary holiday. You can call those memories and you come rushing back, but you can also call them up, go deep inside the gut, and then spiral out through the ladder of your breath. All those years post you know how to leave your body. Now go up.

The Piepznas, the long-lost Ukrainian roots of Kumari's family, have always been psychic when it comes to heartbreak and disaster. Great-great-grandma Pat woke up in the middle of the night and walked down to where the pilot light had gone out and the gas was leaking in 1975 Watertown, Massachusetts, and turned it off before it could kill her daughter and husband. Screamed and threw her arm in front of her husband just before the pickup-driving drunk barreled out of the hidden driveway and would've killed them all. Amma knew when she was about to get dumped via text message in the middle of her fifteenth underfunded queer and trans people of color art tour, 8 a.m. in Los Angeles. Told a lover she dallied with one fall that he would hurt his new lover badly in the fourth month, that the lover would move to New York and break his heart in the ninth month. She waited to see if you would get the gift.

Kumari, she can't see everything, but she can see some things.

There's a whole grip of kids sitting on the pier, cross-legged, waiting. Some wear filter masks; some wear nothing. There are jagged blocks of ex-highway stone and pavement, all tore up.

A lot fell apart. Some people are lucky and live in places that are too toxic to be valuable, but not enough to kill you. Not yet.

All the parents are dead. Mostly. Plutonium leaking. Bombs set off. A weakened ozone shield. The highest concentration of all the cooperative economics and passive solar and transformative justice healing circles in the world can only do so much. War and plague and all those translucent immune systems. All those 2000s thirty-year-olds, they got sick in their forties. Died in their late fifties after a lot of community acupuncture.

The parents died, but left them this.

They nod and circle. Grasp hands. Close eyes. Length, width, depth. Go down. Root. Breathe.

They don't have a lot left, in these zones. Akwesasane, Detroit, the remnants of the East Bay, the fractured necklace of outposts, the care webs, were almost destroyed when everything was almost destroyed. They have backyards. Each other. Big bags of hoarded grains in the pantries. Mushrooms for toxins and tinctures out of looted vodka. What they have always had. And they have this. This is what is working, more than guns or negotiation, to win the war that is left.

Amma, thank you for teaching me.

Kumari closes her eyes, and her spirit leaves her body like all those years ago, but on purpose this time. All the way out her right foot. She can see it trickle out, on purpose. Not gray dead meat. Orange tiger lilies, smeared pollen. She is on the ceiling of the sky, watching. It is so effortless, delicious. She can taste the colors her spirit hovers in. The tongue tip of that lavender cloud, the ways all the colors taste and smell when there are no words to bind them. She can feel it. Then she moves.

It's corny, right? The spirit plane. But really, it's just familiar. The place you go every night when you dream. The place you go when you get on your knees, to that rickety little fruit crate altar, all splintery with cloth from a thrift store called Courage My Love in Kensington Market, Toronto, and an assembly of brown girl, corner-store botanica saints and novelties.

She feels them too. Not alone. The difference with this one is that no one is alone. Some were raped. Some were just taught how to do this. Maybe the weakened ozone shield, the radiation, all the planet's open trauma, has been birthed in them too. It is so much easier than it used to be to come out the top of the forehead.

There are still kids being raped. There are still prisons, functioning in the middle of the gaping maw of utter disaster. There are still bombs being made.

This is what they have.

Back in 2010, Morgan aunty wrote that article for Amma's book, about telling a story that was still being written. It is. Still being written.

Cleveland? Someone thinks or feels toward her. She experiences it as peacock feathers, azure breath, the ghost of a word.

Yes, she feels back. Lavender simple pulse of yes from breastbone.

They move.