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Blue Isn't

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Blue Isn't *Rachel Burns*

No one back in the city has felt real rain. We were lucky to have had it soak through our jumpers and bask in the smell of it. We kept our faces beneath the youngling leaves, breathing between stalks so that we wouldn't stir them. If we moved we'd be dead. Despite the chase and the fear, though, I was glad for the feel of rain.

Your eyes matched the dark, saturated ground, except I've never seen the earth turn black with anger. But you also have Mum's eyes so I held onto that distant connection and welcomed the unfamiliar earth beneath my hands. No one back home has felt dirt, either.

Their orders were given in their helmets, but we could still hear their boots just past the walls. Stealth couldn't part of their training; why would it be, when they just shoot whatever moves. I wished we weren't so valuable together. Maybe if Mum had only been a quarter, an eighth, we wouldn't have been so obvious. There's ways around the blood tests, there's people you can pay. But the evidence is woven in our hair, our bones, our DNA, so close to who we are that I've forgotten who I once wanted to be before I measured myself with percentages.

The stone walls looked older than the city, though nothing is older than home. That's what they always said. Nothing there was like home: the monumental trees, the earthworms beneath us, the windows with colors in the glass. The whole sanctuary felt strange and watchful and I would have held your hand but I knew you wouldn't let me. You kept snarling silently, barring your food-gummed teeth, evidence of the last of our food. I couldn't remember the last time I groomed my teeth, my hair, my wild fear.

Rain from the leaves above dripped on our backs and the forest seemed quiet, but we didn't move, becoming part of the ruins. The soldier could have still been out there.

You finally let go of your grimace and nodded your head to a shard of glass lying between us. Glass in the city isn't colored but this was painted with blue, a shock of color in the cave of green and brown and grey we had found. Blue isn't a color in the city anymore. So, I understand why you wanted to reach out and touch the slick surface and I understand why you held it up to the clouded green light coming down from the tree canopy. Still, I wish I had touched it first. Maybe then you would have seen the soldier behind us and moved away, fled while he shot my leg instead.

But you were shot and then me too and the soldier is standing in the broken archway and I reach across to you and talk to you because I have everything to say to you though none of the right words have stuck around. She's listening to me and I hope she hears how human we are as we die. I think you might be gone already, but I have to keep talking as I dampen the soil with blood because I loved—love—you.