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Destination Unknown

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features are warped. I surface from the water and the words bubble up through my lips to say oh hi, I am fine, how are you.

It's been so long oh wow I can't believe we haven't seen each other here before have you been working here long oh don't you miss high school, she says. Don't you go to school or is this part time, what have you been doing since graduation? I shrink deeper into my chair and bury my mouth and nose into the steamy circle of my mug and peer up into her waterfall of questions. I say, I am well. I do not go to school. I have worked here for a few months. The carpet is wet under my rubber soles. She does not stop smiling and asks me what else I have been doing.

Gray water swells from inside the file cabinets and slides silently down the cold metal. The fluorescent lights overhead flicker with moisture that drips into her hair, and she doesn't notice. My tongue freezes. I say nothing and hold my breath inside my nose. We should catch up, she says, her voice obscured by the dripping. The rest of the office is a clatter of professional e-mails and phone receiver murmurs. It's been so long, let's get brunch this weekend!

I place my mug on my desk with caution. I remember that I was at thirty one before I started trembling and brace myself into my chair. I resist drowning in her words and letting their black seaweed fingers twist around my ankles and pull me into the cool dark. She straightens up and waves, and her little hollow bones float across the glassy water pooling around our feet like a tiny leaf suspended on a creek surface. She clings to her father's arm. I spin my chair back to my computer, where water bubbles up between the letters on my keyboard and over the edge of my small clay flowerpot. Mr. Collier opens the office door and a rush of foamy water slaps him in the face and sweeps her off her feet. They float beneath with their faces unchanged. The water rises quickly, reaching my knees and my elbows and my neck. The men and women and birds and bugs paddle their way to the top, their mouths opening and closing for air. I grip the arms of my office chair tight and hold my breath, just like I practiced, as the salt water creeps toward the ceiling.



Destination Unknown | Julie Hydrick

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