

Chlorine and Other Constants

by Beatrix Aalbers-Davey

"Do you know what that is?" Pippa says, inhaling deeply and bracing her hands against the patio railing. "That's the smell of new beginnings."

"It tastes like chlorine to me," Sam says, not saying that new beginnings are crocuses and spoons, and it's not the right time for new beginnings, it's too bright out. Her hair is waterlogged, and it feels green and granulated.

"No, no, Sam. It's a new beginning. Chlorine is - " Pippa reaches out, splaying her fingers and sweeping her hand across her backyard. "Chlorine is a cleanser."

Sam doesn't argue with that. It is a cleanser. Chlorine looks like it smells, like it tastes, like it feels, a constant. A constant, stinging, watered-down acid green.

She eats another apple slice. Her teeth hurt.

"Chlorine is a cleanser, and it'll get rid of everything," Sam repeats.

"Everything," Pippa says, drinking her pineapple juice out of a champagne glass. It reflects a hazy yellow-marigold of summer card games onto her hand. "Wipe it clean."

"Wipe it clean," Sam says, peering into the pool because she doesn't know what else to say. She adjusts her towel around her shoulders and thinks of graham crackers.

"Did you want to do your photoshoot tomorrow? Most of the peonies finally bloomed," Pippa says, twisting her hair around her fingers and watching the pool water drip down her forearm.

Pippa and peonies and pink.

Pippa is pink. Her hair is pink and her bathing suit is pink and she makes Sam pink and her name is a pink honey stick flavoured like bubblegum. She is constant too.

"Yes," Sam says.

It's quiet, like fireflies, for a while. A warm fall quiet.

"Do we ever have to go inside?" Sam asks, eating another apple slice. Her teeth feel like chipped glass.

"Not if you don't want to," Pippa says.

"I think it's going to be clear tonight." Sam spins the paper plate, watching it catch on the splintery wood of the railing. "I want to see Venus."

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Venus is an orange lollipop.

Pippa is asleep on her watermelon towel, still pink on pink on pink, getting bitten by mosquitos leaving stuffed with pink blood.

Sam is quiet.

And Sam is pink.