

Julie Mariouw

The Angel & the Paper Doll

It felt like breathing in the deep ocean. Her hands iridescent jellyfish, swirling, caressing, holding, breathing. She did it. It wasn't me. Reached down to the center of my body and pulled herself out. "You can move this time," she said. Not with words—but with her silver breath. "You can move."

I wanted to cover my face with my hands but I found I had no hands.

"It's all right," she said, "I'm here."

My body melted into hers and we became one—blues and greens of the ocean filled the operating room. Bright light shone down like the throne of God.

And then I remembered my mother's red lips. Large open mouth, set of words designed to wound. Hands on hips, chest protruding. There but not there. Like a paper doll.

"You can make it this time," the angel said, hands on her hips in the very same way. My breath flowed in and out of me like a wave—green, blue flooding my veins.

"All the world's a stage," she said, red lips protruding.

"You can move this time, you must move," she said, red lips pressed against the styrofoam cup.

It's why I need the iridescent hand. I'm an ancient form of life in the cold, cold ocean, dark and divisive.

"Your mother's killing you," she said, "like poison."

I felt it trickle into my veins. A mother's hand, so soft, so warm—not soft, not warm—hard, cold—bottom of the ocean crushing my bones.

"What will it look like?" she asked.

A baby's hands, fingers curled in on themselves.

"I have been sent," she said, "to assist you." I tried to nod. My head was strapped to the table. But somehow she knew I heard.

They stood side by side—iridescent angel next to paper doll. Not holding hands exactly, but not fighting either. I tried to tell them I saw them both, but my tongue would not move. I had had no water for many hours.

The surgeon's hands moved deftly, grabbed the slippery baby and pulled him to safety. My body groaned to let go of such a prize. The light of heaven shone above me—or was it the light of the operating table? She brushed it with her hand and the color turned to green and blue. It shone over my mother's face—painting her in iridescence. And the two became one for the tiniest of moments.

