

Calypso's Way
by Rosa Aiello

“How long have you been consumed with worry about your tingling fingers?”
“Three weeks.”
“To be exact?”

Apocalypse is a sense of time: an endpoint at which all is revealed.

Every so often there is a storm to cleave the undifferentiated mass of days. And then I just know, because my body has ways of indicating to me changes in atmosphere, changes in fortune. It begins with various reflective greens gone mad in the fickle cross-breeze, a dark sky, winds, and a subterranean rumble that feels like the end of the world. Thank God that each day I make a mark on a calendar, with a red line, to know for sure that yes, this day the boats were tied tight to their moorings, because, from our roof, I see the whitecaps taunting me to come check.

These lizards jump, almost float, across the concrete. This tiny guy, the size of my index finger, with tail, he looked at me in a panic and jumped, flew about a foot.

Leaves float, picked up by the water that filled the tile reservoir of the outdoor shower where I rinsed off the stench of the dead and dying. As the basin drained, the water replaced the leaves lovingly, their positions all changed.

In the market, at the bottom of the barrel of underwear, was a pair that hadn't been unearthed maybe for years. It bore the repeated image of a character whose top of head was made of a zig-zag line - a trace of the other world.

My mother was visited by her mother, who said that in death things move slow. She speaks as if her jaw is churning through tar to form words,
“Its...sss....verrr...y....haa...aarrd.....but.....”

.....g....ooooooooodddd.” This fits with how I imagine death to feel (I say feel because I lack a vocabulary for what lays beyond subjectivity, the dispersed self, the self become infinite multitude) metamorphic, igneous, or sedimentary. And I wonder if, like in geological time, there are moments of ecstatic eruption; a long-buried grain of sand picked up by the wind, and carried across a blazing sea; a tiny piece of me become turbulent, total abandon, the feeling of flying.

We rolled up to visit the cousins who lived on the lemon farm. They lined up at the bottom of the driveway and bared their white flash of teeth. They were so good looking. They all could have been models.

When the life of the living moves slow, it sometimes speeds the overall experience of time. It gives the impression that all of life goes by “in a flash,” “in a breath,” “before you know it.” First, I forbade the use of any such phrase, including, “where has this day gone?” Then, I did all I could to avoid tradition, which speeds time. Like ritual speeds time. Like routine speeds time. An exercise for slowing time would be to place details in time, to parse moments, to prevent the seamless fold from taking hold.

Today, for example: I wake up at five. Mix the antibiotics with the cortisone for the livestock. Prepare the morning syrup for the household, one egg and a tablespoon of ethanol per person. Collect a pile of dry sticks and fallen pine needles. Examine the rock face out of which our house is built, note any significant signs of erosion, ensure no rocks of structural importance have moved, feel a certain sense of security. Walk down to the water, examine the ropes, chains, and anchors that moor the boats, the buoys. Walk back up. Sweat. Fold a piece of paper in a zig-zag pattern to make a fan. Visit the doctor. Fan my face and glare at her as she gives me news.

I noticed about myself that I would walk much further to go through an open door before I'd go through the pains to open one. It was a question of how character comes up against flow. The border of our town acted similarly, the barriers to my crossing being the many routines and responsibilities I was locked into. It would mean breaking confidences, trust, to forgo these routines even for a day. ‘Who, then, will administer the injections?’ ‘What meat will we eat?’ ‘Who will pull in the bounty at the coast?’ ‘Who will make sure the cocks don't kill each other?’ ‘Who will make sure your husband comes?’

I feel buoyed by love, or by the mush of Eros, a salty salty water. This is infidelity for survival. It gives me, if not a sense of freedom, nor of wind against my entire being, at least an impression of interior flow, movement, circulation. Floating with Jumbo, a resourceful guy; he's into making identity cards. “I love your unbelievable gregariousness and maturity,” he tells me. We make vague plans to move North.

I stepped out of the shower, and when I say shower I mean an outdoor area with three copper pipe-ends sticking out of the wall, three faucets, terracotta tiles artificially faded at their centres, and, to indicate a separation between showering areas, lines painted with thick red paint that seemed to sit on top of the tiles in a candied, lacquered, semi-translucent layer that might one

day chip or peel. When I stepped out of the cold shower, after I washed off the scent of having been with him, and began to make a trail of wet steps on the concrete, that's when the lizard saw me and jumped.

A list of the things that keep us here: Poverty, plus poverty of imagination, plus this apparent paradox of there being a class of people both greedy and wanting for nothing. This want of need is maintained by two social codes, and by the line that divides them. One part keeps the other satisfied, the satisfied part never yearns for change, while the part keeping-satisfied yearns in exhaustion.

While they worked they chewed on lemon rind. I had known others, on other farms, with different yields, to chew on bark, or, in other times, that pale rough material that is the skin of sugar beets. They would pull beets, not red ones, but white and gnarled ones, out of the earth. The shapes that came out were shocking, calcified fetuses clawing to escape the land. They would drive these beets in uncovered flatbed trucks to the single processing factory, where the sugars were extracted. At the time, it must have seemed that the earth had been ruined by the homogenizing force of industry. As far as the eye could see were plains of sugarbeets. The native crops had all been uprooted to plant beets to reduce to sugars to sell for cash. But, in my lifetime, I myself have never seen a sugarbeet. The only trace of this former industry is the abandoned sugar-processing plant, rusted and threatening to let fall mammoth shards of corroded steel. Today, diversity has been restored, the romance has tripled, "look at all the lemon trees," "look at all the olive trees." If people actually came here, I might say, 'this is tourism.'

Details of the day before: Not much to say. Hot. Wasted. Under a ton of lemons a black cavern of weapons. Grenades in the olive nets. Munitions in the greenhouse. "Enough!" A woman, sniped in her kitchen. I pulled on my jeans, saw the cousins, got in the car, drove to the given address, cleaned up the mess, collected the cash, and without washing, made a visit to my lover.

Those who do not leave a place have memories that cross over the same terrain, again and again. Repetition makes innumerable folds, like a flat sheet of paper made into a fan held in a hand, which wags insolently in front of the sweating face, covering and uncovering the expression of disgust of the woman holding it. She tells me again and I don't believe her.

"You mean I'm dying?"

"Yes."

"I can't believe this."

"I don't know what to tell you, I'm surprised you didn't already know."

Details of that day: My tingling fingers. Jumbo unzipped my pants to reveal the zig-zag lines. "Cute." Becoming unmoored, and noticing the wet feeling dripping in my jeans when that happens. Wind, in all directions. Doors slam and make a mood as if someone is upset. I'm walking angrily away. That's when I locked eyes with the lizard and he jumped. Of course the

lizard stands for something like my conscience, which regulates flow, keeps me going always in the same direction.

I'll never overcome the guilt that on that day, my mother was reposing against the trunk of a tree, and was visited by a stranger. He said, "be grateful you have had this many days." He asked: "What can you hope for your children? That they meet someone you don't hate and they survive to continue the cycle of hoping for not too much, but for survival and for a good mate, not too cruel or stupid, with whom to make children who will hopefully survive and hopefully find a good mate, not too cruel or stupid." And the voice, already a tinny sinuous thread, faded out into the steel cicada call. Or maybe I hope that they will move North. Become models, she thought. Then "Thud." The unexpected. The primal flash. The looking left and right for a source, and realizing it's come from above: a heavy blunt fruit. Her hand reached into the sticky mess at the crown. She pulled her fingers back, held them in front of her face, stunned at their red wetness. The pain came a moment later and it was as if her life had become a sun spot, dark in the center and blinding on all sides. Then all was dark.

Details of the day directly following the storm: Limpid air. I've been looking up, seeing, for a change, the tops of buildings. I have the feeling I can take it all in, apprehend the whole, the size of a building, the size of a city, the size of an island, and so things appear small. Calypso detained Odysseus for a mere seven years.

Apocalypse is a sense of place: here we reached the end long ago, we are past disaster and have survived, wiser, but cut off from the pre-apocalyptic world. Or was it because we had always been cut off - we had used the same images, however distorted, had suffered the same illnesses of body, society, and environment but couldn't leave, couldn't circulate as the symbols and currency and commodities did - that our ending came first, discontinuous with and nonetheless a version of the ending you all will face soon.

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The Sunniest Beach. After the Splash. The Sanguine. The Token.

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