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## The Vernal Pool

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## Flowers Aren't Beautiful While Watching Them Grow

By Alejandra Flores

There's a small expansive room,  
inside—several more.

Despite cleaning, weekly, there remains  
a persistent sensation of dust,

not in the lungs, not on the finger tips,  
but in the atmosphere, dusty air—dust-prominent ozone.

The dull walls, the elongated hallway, and stout door  
all seem to shake with each step, to wobble, to teeter

to totter, as if the building rested on brick blocks  
or hollow ground. The entire complex appears to bend and waver

when shouldered into, the door shoved away as if it might hold objection;  
the keys crash onto the table, walnut-brown, crescent covered in water rings,

near-missing the uneven mound of mail and clunking dully  
against the hard-cover stacked wall of expensive back-breakers.

It feels better to chuck them once they serve their function.

Soft and silky hair

running like rivulets over the ears, slides smoothly,  
following the hunched shoulders over the ducked head—

an oak fountain—to blanket the eyes, casting the pensive brow

in shadow, obscuring all but slivers of face. The hair

goes unnoticed, there is nothing needing sight and no one  
to demand an eye. So the eye stays down, roaming the room

skimming over the slices of sunlight striping the wall.

A ray catches on the bronze-and-gold stray hair and flickering eye—

illuminating the iris in topaz shards, like whiskey glaciers,  
or fossilized honey, blessed by the sun.

They highlight the pale skin,  
enveloped in dark and haggard crescent-moons hanging beneath  
the bright orbs. The eye wanders away, unaware of what has transpired,  
to sternly stare into the dark throat of the apartment, a hallway seemly small

and too narrow to allow passage. The hair cascades back,  
a gentle spring, following the back-tipped head, pooling left

then right, as the neck slowly leads the head to lean and roll  
across the still slumped shoulders. A heavy sigh

finally propels her forward, crossing the threshold and not turning back  
while reaching to close the door and lock it. Try as the wandering eye might,

the books remain within mind, sight, and reach. Two steps  
to reach the table, a leisurely stretch of the arm to grasp the keys

and deposit them in the plain ceramic bowl. A flick  
of the wrist to brush against the fat textbooks, dragging the arm

across the table and up to the chest, as if the block of pages were a clever fish to reel in. The right hand reaches

up to cradle the book, like a neglected child, across the chest. The left reaches back for another, the worn black fabric

of the backpack slipping effortlessly across the back, causing a momentary unbalance, before both books are resting

atop one another, across the chest. The wheat-tan tongue of the hallway's throat leads to a dark cavern, her room.

It holds two twin beds, a shared dresser, and large window which faces neither east nor west. Deep within the apartment,

as deep as it goes, the muted roar and rumble of cars is no less heard. Her dull, shuffling footfalls echo her path.

The backpack, wearing thin at the bottom, is seamlessly, unceremoniously, shrugged off, a slumping black potato,

on the bed. The body follows close after, minuscule bouncing causing the low mattress to creak. Hunched underneath freshly acquired weightlessness

the arm instinctively snakes back, drawing the zipper producing a notebook, then a pencil, then a pen and returning

once more, for two highlighters before the palm thwacks on the heavy cover of one of the books. Dragging it forward

to set on her lap, the notebook beside,  
utensils on top. The lamp will need to be turned on soon.

She will forget.

Eyes squinting in effort,

headache forming at the temples,  
she'll take a breath and notice

she can no longer see. So she'll stand  
and flick the light on,

and return to her bed,  
to hunch over her work

once more—  
the pale shadows obscuring

the blinking little light  
of her forgotten phone.