

Helter

By Angela Hughes

It never seemed so strange to negate something so strongly opposed to what we detested. It never seemed so strange the day he ironed the tablecloth so we could use it to protect our bottoms from the wet grass. We didn't even consider that to be an oddity. We had met a few times. He told us about himself, and not because we asked. At the time we figured he was awkward and didn't know what to talk about. Perhaps he didn't have experience in social situations at all, and this kind of situation was a particularly strenuous one. He told us about himself, and occasionally asked questions about us. He never waited for the answers. We did not particularly like talking about ourselves so we thought this a god-send, should there be a god. We never noticed the difference between spell check programs demanding that god be spelt with a capital letter. We accepted it as cultural difference, not cultural demand. You never stayed. They kept breeding. He kept saying that it was an accident, that their god did not believe in termination. Even as she faded away he began to make alternative arrangements for the continuance of his gene line. As soon as she passed he would bring in the other women and their abundance of children, eventually moving to a large plot of land he had purchased sometime



after the war. The women loved the way he spoke, the way his eyes dilated when he gave them their orders for the day. The way he would grab their arms if his rice ever touched his sauce. The way the bruises reminded them of him when they were forced to sleep in one of the many cold tents that littered the property should he have chosen another woman for the night. They never questioned it.

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the same cloud that the person next to us sees. Everything is from a different angle. Even out at the property she died on, the clouds looked different to her.

They asked them to leave, and we fought for their ability to stay. To live the way they chose to live. Never once did we wonder why the number of house calls we made in regards to maternity never quite measured up with the number of children we would see running around the property. Or not running. We were virtually pathetic, lost in the picnic blanket and those stupid fucking clouds. He asked us when our birthdays were. It was a question we could answer, because it revealed nothing of what we were. Just how far away we were from our original residences. He asked us when our birthdays were, and on that day, we received a list of names we could not recognise. It was a way to a dream where these children once resided. A nothing time, another day. He liked to light things on fire some days. When the sky was particularly clear and the smell of spring was unbearable. It was two years after the last birthday we celebrated, and that day, in the bushland, where there once was a property burdened with the lives of unnoticeably oppressed fallibles, he lit our

picnic blanket on fire. We lay and looked at the clouds. As the smoke obscured our perception one tiny cloud appeared to me as it did to him, and we were unburdened.

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