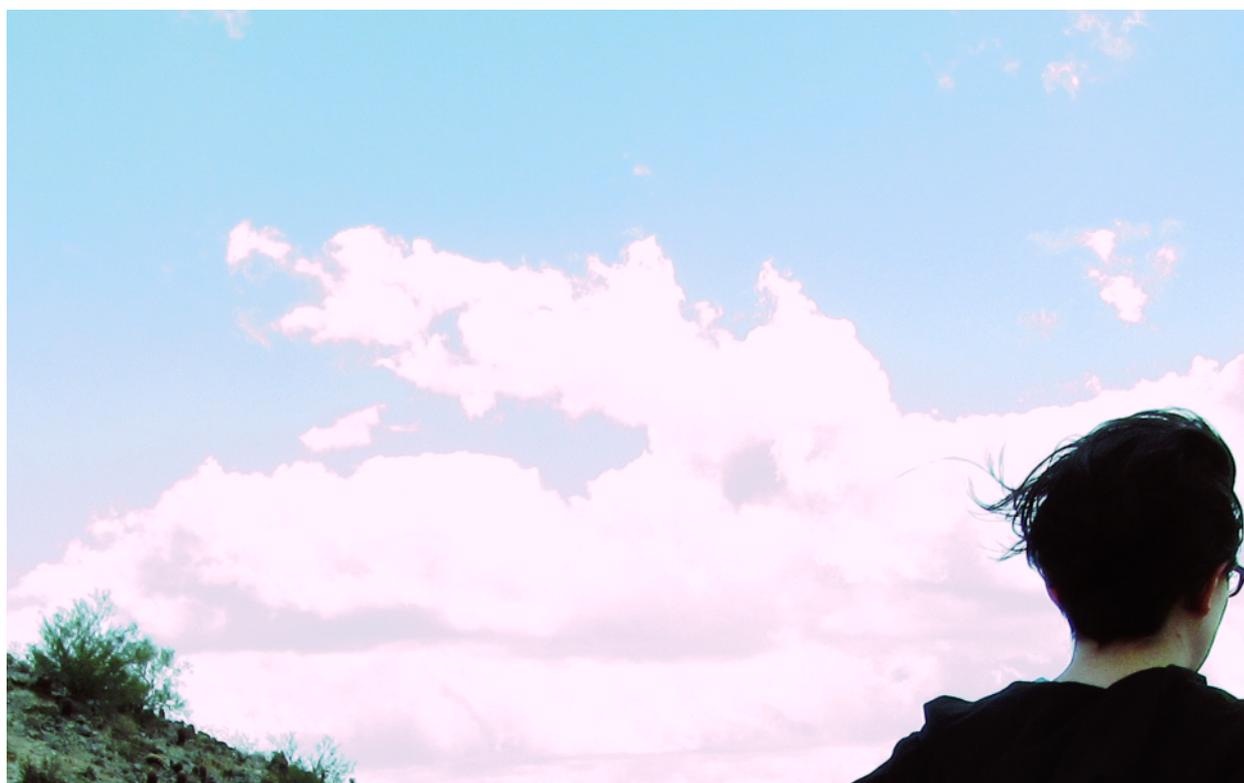


Something About the Light

BETHANY ANDREWS



Today is a perfect, sunny 22 degrees Celsius. The clouds are wispy and cotton-batting-like, so thin they're not even white, more of a film over the blue behind them than anything else. The sun falls in perfect slanted squares over the floorboards, the dog sleeps, sighing at my feet, and I should be content. I should love it in this strange land of peace and safety.

Should is a heavy word to carry.

Instead, I'm homesick.

How do I convey what that means, to someone who doesn't already know? I want to romanticize the way it feels, but I also want to warn you. There is a sprawling island of a city that every year spreads

further into the endless expanse of desert around it and it's what some part of my soul refuses to let go of. The defiance of foreign trees where saguaros should reign; building canals and skyscrapers and sporting arenas in this land of extremes feels like hubris akin to Babel. How can a place feel like home when it's so openly hostile?

It's something to do with the light. It's so *much* - so bright and so relentless - the kind of light that you could call holy. A harsh glare that makes you squint your eyes until it all becomes a shimmering, washed-out haze. There are no shadows to hide your exposure to heaven. The sun has no mercy, and the breeze offers no relief. The heat is under your skin and baking everything around you until you can't even remember what "cold" means. You must always carry a bottle of lukewarm water with you, a sort of talisman that never lets you forget that this place can kill

you. Even when you try to escape into the dark of your house, crouched in hiding like an animal in a burrow, it's waiting for you just outside the windows.

It feels like truth or eternity. Then, abruptly, comes the rain. The rain is an absolute, and there is another holiness found as it bears down on anything left out in offering. You stand in it for mere seconds and are wet down to your skin, feeling the rumble of thunder behind your ribs, blinded like a prophet by the flash of lightning. It is immediate and roaring and demands all of your senses. The retribution of flooding on all the roads is swift and certain. You forget that there is anything but your feet on the

soaked earth and the sound of the sky echoing in your chest. You feel baptized and utterly, wholly alive.

It is over as suddenly as it came, and the petrichor smells like mesquite and creosote and hot cement. The fragrance of this incense is unlike any you will ever find anywhere else and which you will never forget - even ten years later and thousands of miles away, you will half-wake from a dream with a lingering sharpness in your nose. After the rain, the mountains in the distance are bluish in the new air, and tomorrow, there will suddenly be wildflowers at the edge of the abandoned train tracks.

But I am not there anymore. I don't know the ways in which my new land might kill me. I have not found my talisman in this place where God seems to incomprehensibly choose to stay in hiding, here where everything is so green and the light so gentle. The rain is only wet. The trees are casting long shadows on the sidewalk.

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