

I watch the horizon burn, my fingertips numb. The neighbors are cooking steak, medium-rare, charcoal dreams and a silent invasion. Their retriever will eat the table scraps and I'll read my book, pretend not to notice. Gulls fly overhead, periodically dipping into the sea, perhaps searching for what has been extinguished. My fingers are still numb. They have been for years. Next page.

A witness is someone who watches in anticipation.

He takes the cigarette from his lips and exhales my worries. He's unkempt, unshaven, his complexion ashen. He flicks the remnants into the bushes. I wait. I burned down my parent's house in between ninth and tenth grade, right after I'd taken up smoking. I fell asleep and woke up blanketed in smoke. Ignition. Too late. I sat on the curb across the street watching my house turn into a skeleton. I told everyone that it ate itself. The popsicle, cold on my lips, cancelled out the soft burn of the heated pavement. Belated fireworks, my own little party in the middle of July. I thought it was beautiful. The flames were angel wings to me, everything a grand ascension to heaven. The firefighters thought differently. But they were all blinded by the smoke. They couldn't see. Since then, everything I touch turns to ash.

A witness is someone who shapes their destiny through sight.

The bathtub is one of those antique ones with animal feet. The retriever's found his way into our house, into the bathroom where I'm soaking in ice, surrounded by fire. Flames lick the sides of glass containers, wicks blaze. There are reflections in the dog's eyes, twelve little dots of amber, indigo, mandarin. I watch them as they dance to silent Arabic music. My fingertips grow warmer. And move. Water droplets fall and lights go out, one by one. When the illumination is gone I can still see the dog's eyes. Extinguish please.

A witness is someone called upon to view something.

The oven is making me sweat, heating the kitchen until the chicken isn't the only thing roasting. I sit on the linoleum floor in my apron, back to the oven, fingering various herbs and spices. I won't use them later. Just now, left to my own devices. Witches were burned at the stake, sheathed in white, turned into dust while people watched, enjoyed. Maybe I'll be burned one day. Maybe he'll tie me to the stake. Will the chicken watch? Will the dog watch? I'm not a witch. I don't cast spells. But my fate seems to be sealed by the horizon, the rising waves of heat off the pavement, the striking of a match, kerosene.

A witness is someone who wants to watch but doesn't simultaneously.

It's inside my now. My fingertips are numb as always. External. Internal. He's sitting on the balcony, drinking tea, smoking, smoldering. Ashes, ashes, and I've fallen in. Dragons are mythical creatures with exceptional power. Smoke pours from his nostrils and I'm wrapped in talons. It's inside. I want to be outside. I go to the sliding glass door and press my hot forehead against it. They both smile at me, man and beast. Come inside and burn.

A witness is someone who looks for opportunity.

Neolithic man painted on the walls of caves, like the ones in Lascaux, the Hall of the Bulls. My caves are dark, wet, black. There was a spark, then another, then a torch. I carry one by his side. Light me up. Light the way. The dog follows. Paw-prints mark our history, where we've been, he and I. Time after time I trace it back with my deadened fingertips. We're homo-sapiens holding

fire in our hands.

A witness can tell someone what happened.

Let me burn.

Look through dog-eyes.

Liven my fingertips.

Watch and learn.