

Little Sleep Song

By Angela Regas

They used up the tabs on the first day. Winken had gotten them relatively cheap, so they squandered them in a frenzy of fingers and tongues. By the end of the second day, Blinken could almost close his eyes without seeing balloons hiding in the warmth behind his eyelids. He celebrated by taking Winken's car and driving around until morning. Winken and his sister, Nod, having shared their own private stash before even starting out, continued on with their strange, blissful smiles for the rest of the night.

Red, burning rocks.

Sea anemones. Nod said. And the clouds look like waves.

Man, they're red, Winken said. They're red.

Nod, the younger one, giggled. You said man. She exaggerated when she said it, pitching her voice up and pulling out the "a." Maaan.

Fuck you, he said.

She tried her best to look down at him. She was going to be tall, everyone said so, but at thirteen she still only reached up to her brother's shoulder. And he was standing up. Fuck you, too, she said. She got up and danced around a cactus.

When Blinken returned, he found her lying in the sand with a gnarled saguaro growing from the tips of her hair. At the sound of the car, she turned her head and smiled. She was just beginning to know what she looked like, and just beginning to like it. Against the monotony of her surroundings, she felt interesting, alive. She hoped the light was good enough for him to notice. If he did, she couldn't tell, and so she turned away again and closed her eyes. By the time it was bright enough to see clearly, she had fallen asleep.

Winken had lain down in the same spot he'd been standing, watching the space that Blinken disappeared into with the car. His car. It had been his father's, and Winken always claimed that it was his by right. His and Nod's, but she didn't want it. But Winken hadn't known what to do with it, and had left it sitting in front of the house since his father had left it there seven years ago. For years afterwards, Winken would sit in the driver's seat, with his feet hanging out the door, looking for signs of his father, for patterns in the ash that might point out where he had gone. But the car rusted, and its wooden sides fell apart, and when he met Blinken his junior year, the car could barely be distinguished from the dead grass it sat on.

Blinken, on the other hand, knew what to do with an old wood-sided car. And what he didn't know, he found out. It had been Blinken who'd first driven it off of the front lawn, and he remained the only one who could ever keep it running. That summer, three weeks after his sixteenth birthday, his license arrived from Sacramento and he persuaded his friend Winken to let him take the car for a road trip. Winken said sure, as long as he could go. And his mother allowed it, as long as he took his sister along.

And the dawn of the third day found the three of them sleeping, their faces turned towards the sky,
Winken,
Blinken,
and Nod.

By mid afternoon, Winken had noticed the first problem. He opened his eyes, and before he could move his arm to block the glare, he realized that the skin around his eyes pained him just as much. Gingerly, he felt his face. It burned the tips of his fingers. He turned his hands over and saw, underneath the tan, a sunburn creeping to the surface. Swearing, he walked over to the car for shade and sunblock. That was the real problem: the car. He and Nod hadn't ever bothered to ask about gas; Blinken always took care of that. Sometimes he asked for money, which they gave without complaint, but usually he made it a point of pride to keep the car running without help. He hadn't counted on getting lost the night before in the rocks somewhere near Yuma, and he didn't know how much gas it had taken to find his way back again.

And so when he woke to Winken's burnt hostility, he assumed that Winken had found the empty cigarette boxes he'd left in the trunk. But he figured he had a right to smoke anything left in the car. He had a right. It's okay, he said. I'll get us some more at the next gas station.

Where? Winken yelled. We're in the middle of nowhere.

Well then you can fuckin wait until we get back. Blinken replied.

We don't even have enough to get that far. I checked. What the fuck are we supposed to do?

Well if you'd ever get your fuckin cheap bitch-ass up and get some yourself, you wouldn't have a problem. You coulda gotten more at the last gas station. Shut up and let me get some sleep.

Winken didn't know what he would have said then, couldn't think of anything but the empty gas gauge and Blinken's smug self-satisfaction. But Nod finally said something, and walked over to her brother and her brother's best friend. When Winken explained, she began to cry.

She hadn't meant to. She hated to cry in front of Winken, but the absence of LSD made everything feel like an edge; everything was hard and real. She imagined the way they might

look on a grainy news camera in a few weeks. How far can we go on what we have? She asked. No one answered.

But, one by one, they picked up their things, and took them to the car. Blinken made a little circle in the dirt and then started back the way they came. Look, it's like crop circles. Now people will think we're aliens.

Nod said Yeah. Maybe they will. That would make a better story, aliens. Not just some kids stuck somewhere, with a beat up woody and a fifth of whiskey. They had landed there, and they were going to fly away again. Leaving behind a circle of tire tracks in the dirt.

When the car finally stopped, they got out and tried to get drunk. Nod succeeded, and Blinken came pretty close. Neither of them could talk straight, which saved them the trouble of trying to talk at all. Nod kept her mouth firmly on the bottle, or, when someone else insisted, she relinquished it and chewed on her fingernails. By the fifth time Blinken insisted, her nails had begun to bleed. And after the sixth interruption, she looked through her pockets for something else to do with herself. She came up with a couple of pennies, a wallet, a compact, and nail polish. So when the blood seeped out the edges of her fingernails, she painted over it. When she finished, she waved her arms through the air, her thin fingers spread as wide as she could, flashing silver-pale and gold.

You trying to fly?

Yeah, she said. I'm flying.

Blinken stumbled towards the car, one hand fumbling with the front of his jeans. With the other hand he opened up the gas tank.

What the fuck are you doing?

Fillin up the car, said Blinken. We're gonna take off.

Nod began laughing. There was nothing left to do. It came up and out through her mouth and nose and shot through the cold thin air. They weren't that far from El Cajon. Maybe her friends could hear her laugh as they dreamed. Maybe someone would hear, and rescue them. Maybe her mother was listening right then, and dreaming of rescue.

Where was her mother now? Working, probably, thinking of the children that she only saw on her off-days, or when one of her jobs ended early and sent her home. Dry yellow mother, thin like an unripe orange peel, or crackers-and-peanut-butter left on the table after school. She probably hasn't noticed we're not home, thought Nod. After a while, Winken laughed with her. And behind them, they could hear Blinken giggling, and gasping for air.

None of them knew how long they stayed like that, taking in fistfuls of air and heaving it out again. But by the time they sobered enough to remember the sleeping bags, their lungs had chilled and lost all feeling. They lay down silently.

Winken couldn't sleep. No matter how furiously he rubbed his palms together, blowing on them, he could only make a sliver of heat that faded when he tried to put his hands to his chest. But at least his hands were warm. His breath glowed as it surrounded them. And as he started to shiver, they grew warmer and whiter, burning. The sunburn, growing, took in all the heat from his body and burned it brighter and brighter. What would it feel like to touch someone now? He reached out and watched his hands push back the sky. If he stretched them out far enough, he might follow them, up--

* * *

Blinken stared at the sand in front of him, trying to think. How many miles had they driven? He couldn't remember. But the sand seemed to stretch out endlessly, smooth and flat except for bits of quartz and mica that sent up sparks where the moonlight hit. Endlessly glittering.

When he closed his eyes, he dreamed of them: a thousand glittering pieces, a thousand things he could do. He could fix things, he always could. There must be something, some single grand thing that he could do to make everything better. He tried to piece all those little lights together into something that would make sense, something to hold in front of him, and follow, like a plan--

* * *

From where she lay, Nod could see the mole at the nape of Blinken's neck, and, if she lifted her head just slightly, the shallow crescent of his cheek. She'd never admit it, but she hadn't slept the night before, imagining the shifting light of his face.

She thought about how her best friend in sixth grade had told her that boys' lips felt sort of like the inside of her elbow, except of course that they were lips and not elbows, and so she stretched her arm out and tried to kiss it. She experimented with different kinds of kisses, the ones she had seen in movies, and the ones she had imagined when leaving lipstick prints on the mirror. Hard ones, and shivering ones. Kisses that leave round pink stains. She laughed. I wonder if I have hickeys. And then, I hope real ones feel nicer.

* * *

As the moon sank, it drew the clouds with it, drowning the stars. Nod pulled the sleeping bag over her arms, watching as--one by one-- they disappeared.

Winken, Blinken, and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe--
Sailed off on a river of crystal light,
Into a sea of dew.