

Good

<https://soundcloud.com/americanshortfiction/libby-flores-good>

Sea grass tickled the backs of our knees as we crossed the beach. Meredith was trailing behind, humming something familiar, but it was faint, mixed with the salt in the wind. Barefoot, I sank deeper. We were walking toward the water, meeting the edge of the continent, both feeling strange. I turned to make sure she was behind me. Her blond hair was flying back as the long grass waved.

That hair was always whispering to me. In my car once, when we were both too drunk, she talked until our heads fell together like the top of a teepee. Eyes closed, she hiccuped for an hour while I let the heat run in my old Toyota. That was when we lived in Chicago. Before I started the engine I turned my head and placed my nose in her hair. She had a different boyfriend then. I wasn't *anyone's* boyfriend yet. That night she let my hand skim her black tights, nearly missing the crotch.

Although summer was ending, the east coast sky held grey suds of clouds as if we were at the bottom of a sink full of dirty dishwater. Meredith caught up and placed her thin arm around mine, hooking our elbows. Her pink lips doing an impression of a smile. I came to Provincetown to attend a wedding of a friend of ours. To tell her I, too, was going to marry. Marry a girl she'd never met.

I was distracted by what I'd worn to announce this news. My once-pressed grey slacks were now rolled up past the shins, and my Oxford—reserved for interviews—was unbuttoned. The undershirt was one of the older ones, its pits blooming soft, yellow stains. I wore it because it would be the last thing I would take off and it promised nothing. She tugged my arm as my shirt billowed back, and now our feet were out of the white dust and smacking on the wet sand like drying cement. We left these indentions as we found the sea.

Come on, chicken, she said, unhooking us, and I stood still as she ran into the mouth of the ocean, the bottom of her white dress soaking up water like a dinner roll and her hair blowing back again toward me.

She held her arms up and waded deeper, her lean body slightly rocking at each wave. I called to her, *Wait*. I said her name. She was too tipsy to swim, her laughter was feral, she wanted it to infect me enough to follow her. Then I saw her stumble and her body go down.

A few sand dunes away a crab was belly up and not done yet. His claws still moving like keys of a self-playing piano.

Once out of the water Meredith reached down to the jellyfish sting, the red lashes still rising around her ankle. She didn't touch it—the motion was just to remind me it was there. I wondered if this was how she would remember me: a man who had to piss on her leg, an idiot who made her turn her head so he could do so.

I still couldn't tell her. We'd be laughing soon, and I was already thinking of wet clothes on the leather seats of my rental, how something would need to be removed. I thought of Susan's name in my head, the letters resembling those alphabet refrigerator magnets for kids. Could I say it was her idea? Could I claim I was marrying her to be good?

Meredith placed her hand on my shoulder. There was that strangeness again. The tide was getting higher, the foam hurrying to meet our toes. Her teeth started to chatter and I wanted to put my arms around her. Tell her that I'd be deep-sea diving on my honeymoon and would see her in the reef, a rock with a head full of seaweed the color of her hair, and I'd pass through it not just my hand but the length of my whole body.

[clear-line]

Libby Flores is a 2008 PEN Center USA Emerging Voices Fellow. Her short fiction has appeared in *Post Road Magazine*, *The Open Bar at Tin House*, *The Rattling Wall*, *Paper Darts*, *Bridge Eight*, *FLASH: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. She lives in Los Angeles, but will always be a Texan. She can be found at libbyflores.com.