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The couple sat by the window at the front of a quaint downtown joint where a simple wedge salad cost \$15.

A thick, white table cloth hung flawlessly from the edges of the wooden table. In the middle was a rectangular glass jar filled halfway with polished, gray stones and a decorative fire on top made of red and orange tissue paper.

She didn't smoke, but Mr. Higgins did and his name was the one on her paychecks. He would often step out to smoke a cigarette and immediately come back in to ask for a lighter. Failing to provide one during her first two days of work, he recommended that having a lighter might help her career. After a year, she still answered the phone and managed the walk-in traffic.

She flicked a lighter in her pocket, creating random flashes of light on her hip that brought the small flowers which decorated her dress to life.

His custom suit matched his tie, reminiscent of liquid metal, which reflected the light that bounced off his cucumber water. Not a blonde hair was out of place and a look was carved on his face that made it impossible to tell if he was smiling or not. He was like a cologne model waiting for a photograph.

She secretly hated him. They looked at each other and smiled. He scribbled his name at the bottom of the check.

She stared through the window and past the two lanes of traffic to the park. Some benches were scattered on the manicured lawn which was contained by white concrete on all sides with a couple of paths crisscrossing through the middle and running from corner to corner. A week of intense heat had left the grass a bit pale and scorched. However, ripples of grey clouds stretched across the sky, offering hope of respite for the plant-life.

Mr. Higgins stood silently. Without a word or hesitation, she followed him outside. The heels of her shoes clacked obediently on the sidewalk. He looked both ways before ushering her across the steamy, black pavement with his hand on her lower back as a foreboding wind tumbled clumsily through the street. They took the path across the park toward his Mercedes. That's when she felt the first drop of rain.

It landed in the depression between her shoulder and neck where it splashed into several smaller drops on impact. She slowed her pace and with her middle finger rubbed the water into her skin. As her skin absorbed the liquid, she eyed a small crack in the concrete where a sprig of grass lived. Left to fate, it would spread. More grass would escape. The insanity of concrete and numbered streets would be replaced.

Clouds raced in. More drops of rain began to fall. She closed her eyes and sighed in relief as the breeze revealed every drop that found a home. Every speck was accompanied by an ancient whisper that raised her skin.

Lightning struck nearby and a loud clap of thunder shook the ground. Though it took her breath away, she did not move. Her companion, however, was hunched over like a monkey and teetering toward her. She had never seen him look so small. She smiled.

As he approached, she noticed his hair had become possessed and strands were starting to reach for the sky. He grabbed for her waist. Her toes dug into the bottom of her shoes, rooting into the earth. Anticipating her obedience, he pulled her toward the car.

She was nearly immovable, but the concrete and her shoes prevented true strength and she fell. She caught herself with the palms of her hands, cutting them. She

stood back up and gently brushed the hair from her face, creating a smear of blood on her cheek.

Lightning struck again and Mr. Higgins began an awkward sprint to the car. She made no attempt to follow. She saw a distant flash of yellow and red light that accompanied the unlocking of any modern car. He had not yet noticed that she was not on his heels. She heard the horn beep and signaled him to leave. The roar of German precision quickly faded as the rain began to pour.

Her hair was matted to her face and neck. It was bizarre and wondrous to embrace the torrent. It felt like home.

Blood surfaced on both her palms and she wiped them on her dress, leaving bright red streaks. She took a step and the heel of her shoe slid into the sidewalk crack and broke, so she removed them both and tossed them aside. She walked off the path and into the grass. Water streamed down her back, chest, and stomach. The blood stains spread into the wet material. She welcomed the cool wet grass on her feet and between her toes.

Slowly, she strolled alone in the park. She ran her hands down her body, encouraging the rain to soak every molecule until she noticed the lighter in her pocket. She reached in and flicked it. Despite the rain, it sparked through her dress and she began a slow, enchanted stroll

back to the quaint, downtown joint. She opened the door, dripping water on the tile, and walked past the hostess toward the table at the window, like an apparition. She pulled the lighter from her dress and struck it with her thumb. It caught fire and she put the flame to the small glass jar. The paper ignited and the small flames danced to the sound of the rain. On the cold floor, her toes rubbed the blades of grass and dirt between themselves and she watched the orange and red paper turn to ash.