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## FABLE

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Chloe Martinez

You were five hundred ants,  
a black column winding across the kitchen wall,

pooling like ink in the trash can, if ink were  
alive. You were looking for water, as you

(or some other five hundred ants)  
always do in the heat, in September.

I was the woman  
with the spray-bottle of Windex, I'm sorry,

in the middle of the night; five hundred  
black specks, you, scattered in a panic;

subsided; died. The bottle leaked somehow,  
bleach-smell strong on my hand for hours.

I was ruthless. I left all your dead bodies  
stuck to the wall for the new scouts to find.

everyone on board. Place client on twenty-four-hour suicide watch and discuss an increase in meds with his therapist. Client would also benefit from an increased exercise plan—encourage him to participate in recreational activities, such as swimming or breakdancing. If these measures fall short, consider mutiny.

After finishing grad school, I move to New York City, where I land a job as an editor at a publishing company and spend much of my free time working on a novel. Some artist friends and I live in Brooklyn, in a huge converted loft apartment in a former button factory. I'm lucky to have steady work and an amazing apartment, but I'm never really comfortable in New York. Being from the West, I feel hemmed in by NYC's frenetic pace, the congestion, the lack of green space. The one truly open area I find is the ocean—particularly places like Rockaway Beach and Montauk, where I get seriously obsessed with surfing. I also find myself tracing Melville's path in New York City—visiting his birthplace, the Unitarian church he frequented, and obsessively pouring over my heavily marked copy of *Moby Dick*. The story takes on a whole new meaning now that—like Ishmael—I'm a dissatisfied, young New Yorker looking for an escape route on the ocean.

In May of 2006, I fly back to Colorado for a friend's wedding. I arrive in Denver, rent a car, and drive to my stepsister's new house. It's in a "rough" neighborhood called Five Points, a notorious place when I was growing up in Colorado during the eighties, but it's since started to gentrify. Turning onto her street, I laugh at what she considers "rough." It looks like a normal urban neighborhood to me—hell, it even has *trees*. And unlike my own street in Brooklyn, there are no graffiti tags, rats, broken beer bottles, used condoms, or female junkies shooting smack in broad daylight. I have trouble finding the house, so I call.

"Do you see me?" she says. "I can see you. You're in a silver car. Look behind you."

I turn around and there she is, standing in front of an old brick Victorian with a newly-planted yard and unpainted picket fence, a great starter house for my kid sister the lawyer and her firefighter husband. I'd wager their mortgage is less than my Brooklyn rent; I feel that special little stitch of envy reserved for

older siblings. I'm anxious to give her a hug, but I can't get the keys out of the ignition. I sit, fiddling, until she taps on the window.

"Hey," she mouths. "What's wrong?"

I roll down the window. "The fucking keys are stuck."

"That's weird," she says. She gets in on the passenger side to assess the problem. Two years since we've last seen each other, but we've yet to formally greet each other—no *how was your flight?* or *great to see you!* For some families this would indicate distance, but for us it shows how close we are, the fact that we can forego pleasantries and team-tackle a problem at hand. If we've learned anything from our pastiche of a family it's this: *things go wrong, so deal with it.* Our parents actually divorced long ago, so technically we're *ex-step-siblings*—a complicated label we mostly ignore.

"So how's New York?" Steph finally asks. She's messing with the gear shift, making sure it's in park.

"It's pretty much a disaster," I say, still yanking on the keys.

"Are you talking about New York or this car situation?"

"Both."

She looks up from the gearshift, scans my profile. "You look tired," she says. "Better let me try." She takes my spot in the driver's seat; I find the owner's manual in the glove box and stand in the street next to her, straining to read in the dim chemical streetlamp glow. I'm totally baffled by what I discover. "If a malfunction occurs," I read out loud, "the system may trap the key in the ignition cylinder to warn you that this safety feature is inoperable. The engine can be started and stopped, but the key cannot be removed until you obtain service. You have to be kidding me. What General Motors *genius* came up with this one?" It's after midnight; I'm tired and want to sleep, but now it looks like I'll have to drive the car back to Advantage or wait an hour or more for a tow truck. The other option is leaving the keys in the car overnight, which in Five Points doesn't seem like such a hot idea.

Like an exclamation mark to that thought, brakes squeal, tires skid on asphalt, and then there's a black SUV right behind us.

The back door flies open, apparently kicked from the inside, revealing a kid with a gun trained on us. He has a blue ban-

## APOLLO

Chloe Martinez

Their voices come back to us thin with static:  
describing a pockmarked dustscape, they sound

almost disappointed, until they turn and see—  
blue-marbled, strange, familiar—earth

rising over that dry horizon, the continents  
all in their right places, clouds

over the Canaries, clear sky over Mexico,  
the sea around the land around the sea.

It's Christmas. The astronauts read Genesis  
over the airwaves to the listening world,

And in the beginning God created the heavens  
and the earth, tenderly, with a Texan twang,

as travelers, having crossed oceans, stand on a cliff  
squinting into the distance, trying to see home.