The Shell in Silk

Nancy Baird

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My father, whitening, leached of rage and spear of justice, now leans to my mother. In his terribly, exquisitely earned wisdom even he does not see why he sheathes his sword, circles to her light.

Like an alabaster moth, young and delicately flawed, she floats by his side, straining his sorrow, curving her wings to hear him say she is beautiful.

In their house above the black cliffs he rubs her beautiful legs. Bougainvillea filters the light, the room in an aubergine wash. Outside the screens, above the wet grasses, spirit and rain are sheeting the mango trees.

She is everything he could never desire or hope for, a gift in an unopened silk envelope left on the pillow, a secret carved in the grain of the perfectly turned koa bowl gleaming in the rose and yellow light of the quiet room.

—Nancy Baird