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Immiscibility

Parker Blakeman rested his shoulder against the window frame and explained the principle of Immiscibility to his class. Water, he said, will mix with other liquids, but oil and water do not mix. Outside, a puddle shivered in a gust of wind, its surface streaked with bluish gold. Adam Corrigan stifled a belch, jabbed an elbow into Allison Keenan's ribs. Allison Keenan squirmed in her seat, slid her chair a bit to the left. Molecules, Parker said, are strongly attracted to those of the same kind, like water to water and oil to oil. Jeremy Feinberg swept his hair out of his eyes, gave his container of oil and water a more vigorous shake. This failure of molecules to bond, Parker explained, proves the principle of Immiscibility, that certain things cannot be mixed no matter what.

When Parker Blakeman moved to the Parham Street Flats he considered it a good place to think. Surrounded by native bush and a well-groomed lawn, he imagined brushing his teeth by an open window and filling his lungs with a rich and earthy ease. At first, it was only in passing that he'd seen the woman who lived upstairs, tall with angled features, dark hair, green eyes. At the grocery store he'd spotted her once in the frozen foods, a thin gold bracelet round her ankle, a turquoise ring around one toe. With his basket that day filled with instant soups and heat-and-eats he chose not to nod or say hello. Instead, he shimmied past with downturned eyes. At the Parham Street Flats the walls were thin, the building cursed with pre-war plumbing. In the evenings he would shower and wonder if she could hear. Her bed, he knew from the creaks her mattress made, was directly overhead. Kept awake by the drumming of feet on bare wood, he would lie on the sheet, fingers laced beneath his head, and think. About the warmth in the crook of her elbow, the soft curved well between her collarbone and neck.

Raindrops, Parker Blakeman said, an index finger on the window pane, are examples of adhesion and cohesion in everyday life. Adhesion, he explained, is what holds the drops to the pane, while cohesion can be seen in the paths each drop makes as it travels down the glass. Parker tilted the window open, inviting in a rush of springy air; it carried an aroma of something sweet and something tart. Allison Keenan pursed her lips, pointed to the puddle that had formed on the sill. To split a drop, Parker explained, is to break the bond which holds the molecules together. Adam Corrigan shouted, *Bam!* and zapped the glass with his forefinger and thumb. Jeremy Feinberg rolled his eyes. Because of cohesion, Parker explained, drops close in proximity will join like magnets; it is a natural process. It is far easier, he said, to join drops together than to split them apart.

Her name was Bianca, the woman upstairs. This Parker learned one muggy evening, someone calling to her from the street below. *Bi-an-ca! Bi-an-ca!* The rhythm of a roiling ocean, rough surf slapping sand. He'd heard the sound of muted conversation, someone at her door. Most nights, though, he knew she slept alone. If he lay very still and listened, really listened, with his hands clasped across his chest, he could hear the soft, irregular heartbeat of music from upstairs. Alone in his flat with his curtains

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half drawn he would breach the space between them, draw her into view. With her head propped in one hand he saw her, cigarette dangling, shower-damp hair, round eyes. Across the bed she would be lying, one bare foot keeping time to the music's flirty tempo, pulsing blue-grey circles through her lips and tongue. *Bi-an-ca! Bi-an-ca!* The dance of fingertips on smooth bare skin, three beats between the rumble and the flash.

Light, Parker Blakeman explained to his class, moves more slowly through water than it does through air. In front of him he held a glass of water, in it, a pencil poised straight up and down. He instructed the children to do the same, then view their pencils from the side. Allison Keenan shook her head, said if her pencils got wet her mum would be mad. Jeremy Feinberg, at a corner table, jammed his into a sharpener and ground its shaft to a stunted nub. When held straight up and down, Parker said, the pencils appear to be straight, but when rested against the side of the glass, you'll see, your pencils will appear to bend. Adam Corrigan said, Hey, wow! What super powers Parker had, to bend a pencil in a single bound. Parker explained that when light enters water, it slows down and bends, speeding up and bending back when it re-enters the air. He leaned forward, palms flat on the desk. This distortion, he told the class, is an effect of refraction, which can cause an object to appear different than it really is.

One late afternoon Parker Blakeman stood on the steps outside the flats. On the footpath the twins from 2B were squabbling, as always, about whose turn it was to ride the bicycle they shared. With his back to the door he paused, thumbs hooked in his belt loops, to observe the simple politics of rock-paper-scissors, of making a fist and counting to three. When he turned to go inside, there she was, right there in front of him, gold hoop earrings, bare midriff, skirt slung low on the bell curve of her hips. Her hair was up and secured in place by a large wooden clip. The air, he felt, seemed suddenly charged with a fragrance both tawny and sweet, the distinctive fusion of tobacco and tangerine. When she took a step towards him in an attempt to sidle past, he held his ground. He paused, rubbed his jaw with the heel of his hand, his breath now hard and quick. *Bi-an-ca! Bi-an-ca!* A boomerang rhythm, a fever that never breaks. There was so much he wanted to say to her, wanted to explain. But his thoughts had turned to bodies, celestial bodies spinning in orbit, driven against one another and crash landing in a confluence of rock and ice. When the pause between them went on too long her gaze fell out of focus, looking at him and through him at the same time. With her bag over one shoulder she repositioned her stance and asked, quite sincerely, if there was something wrong. He pulled in a breath, glanced back at the twins, shook his head. Never mind, he said.

In the classroom the children were asked, once nicely once firmly, to stop playing with their eggs. Some eggs, Parker Blakeman explained, were hard-boiled while the others were raw. Jeremy Feinberg wrinkled his nose, wondered aloud how they could tell which was which. Adam Corrigan said he was allergic to eggs. When spun on their sides, Parker explained, all eggs will stop spinning when a finger is gently placed on the top. When, he said, that finger is removed, the hard-boiled eggs will remain motionless, while those which are raw will begin spinning again. Allison Keenan wanted to know if, after class, she could take the eggs home to her mum. The exerted force of your finger, Parker explained, although

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sufficient to stop the movement of the shell, cannot stop the motion of the liquid inside; This demonstrates, he said, Newton's First Law of Motion, that an object will remain in one state until a force acts to either put it in motion or bring it to rest.

On the day the woman upstairs moved out, Parker Blakeman was standing near the edge of the footpath, gaze turned downward, flipping through his mail. Out on the lawn the twins were exploring the laws of aerodynamics with a kite. He glanced up in time to see her slide into the passenger seat of a panel van, gold bracelets jangling, lips pursed in a half-smile. From where he stood he could not see the face of the driver, but by the look of the hands that gripped the wheel he could tell he was cut from sturdy cloth. Overhead and to his left, the gypsy-coloured canopy swooped and soared, straining against its invisible lead. As the van pulled away he felt the lift and drop of opposing forces, of being in motion yet perfectly still. As a child, Parker recalled, he used to dream that he could fly. Unfettered by gravity or the improbability of flight he would rear up, lift off, go free-wheeling across that wind-scrubbed sky. Squinting into the distance he watched as the twins jumped and cheered. One held steady while the other ran, arms extended at his sides, loose hair flailing, cutting a path through the midday air.