

Beatrix Zwolfer  
**Purple**

*THE HUCKLEBERRIES ARE LATE THIS YEAR*, my brother tells me beneath the midday bake of the August sun.

My younger sister crouches eye-to-eye with the bare green bushes. *Where'd they go?*

*Nowhere*, says my brother. His cheeks are a sunburnt map, marking his days of searching with relentless peel. He lifts a leaf but finds nothing, not even the hard bump of an adolescent berry. *They were never here.*

*Oh.* She mirrors him and flips a leaf to its veiny backside. *Are they coming then?*

My brother straightens, and his knees pop. One. Two. Like a scattering of fireworks. *They're just late*, he says and beckons with a dirt-stained hand. *We'll come back tomorrow.*

My sister bounds after him, ponytail bouncing against her back. I follow, squinting against the sun. I can feel the flush creeping across my nose. Sweat trickles down my neck and brines my lips. I swallow against the salt and taste a lingering trace of sweetness in my throat, and then I swallow that down too.

Tomorrow, my brother will herd us back into the woods to search for huckleberries. We will flip leaves and scour bushes, searching even though there is nothing there. *Just late*, he will say, and like today that statement will be a lie.

Tomorrow, I will wake with the sun while my siblings sleep and creep past their rooms on tiptoe. In the dawn, the sun will be gentle, dappling my arms with gold instead of pink as I reach for the morning's fresh berries. They will be plump and sweet as dew, fringed with tingling tartness.

*Ready for some huckleberries?* My brother will ask tomorrow with a crease-eyed smile, and I will smile back and tuck my purple stained fingers in my pockets, away and out of sight.