

THE
FIXTURES
AND
FITTINGS
OF

X A E L

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Formation

She began as we all do.

A murmur, a pinprick, a scream.

Her mother focused on the crack that snaked its path

Across the eggshell ceiling.

Her father focused on her mother.

Neither predicted, as they reached for their gin and soda,

Glares across tight, foggy sheets,

That this event was not like the others.

This time would track and trace their reveries

For the rest of their years.

Nascency

Xael allowed herself to be elevated.

Held in the current of a wave,

She bore the cerise and crimson clothing

As though it was all she had ever worn. It fit,

A glove, a tightness, extreme pressure around her skull,

And then...

Bright, salted, air.

She was not accepted with open arms,

But this, she did not know.

And so, Xael went out into the world alone.

Youngling

Things Xael knew, age 4:

A shoelace was a challenge,

Spaghetti was eaten on a Tuesday only,

Indoor voices were used at nursery,

Sofia was not her friend,

Not all memories are real.

Especially that one, about her mother.

No, that one was not real,

Listen carefully.

Could she stop going on about it, please?

Minor

The soft, velvet, muzzle
That dipped in the centre,
And the intoxicating aromas of leather,
Battling with earth and sweat.
Their hearts beat at the same speed as her own.
Astride, Xael would close her eyes,
Feeling the muscles work beneath her bones,
Hearing kindness, joy, admiration.
Finally, the praise she had waited for.
Her community enveloped her.

Ms

How had she succumbed to this?

The jeering, mocking, concealed sneers

That shadowed her from one moment, to the next.

And now she fixated on a strange crack in the ceiling

Until it was complete.

The revelry that followed was nauseating,

And yet, Xael joined in.

Finally! They howled, as they grabbed her by the hand.

She stared. A resolution, made.

Her first, and her last.

Bard

Toiling and trying, and typing.

Golden rays playing dappled games

Over coffee cups.

They, who trailed, from room to room,

Ever present at her heel, by her side,

In her space. Their fur clung to the air.

Practice, and preparation, and more typing.

To be that woman, she would say,

I must put in the time.

They watched her, ever present.

Maturity

Her nautical name spoken aloud.

Xael.

She would say it into microphones and receive

Applause. Applause. Applause.

At night, she was tranquil, bordered by new lives,

But never human.

At night, she was herself.

They asked for her, as though she counted.

And so she would continue,

Typing. Typing. Typing.

Autumn

The adult offspring of friends,

A peculiar blend of concerned brows.

You should slow down, they'd say.

Xael won't stop until she's dead, came the retort,

Though not from her. A cliché.

She began to think of her mother, at the strangest times;

In the shower, putting out the rubbish,

Feeding the creatures.

Did her mother slow down? She speculated.

Did her mother see her title emblazoned in text?

Centurial

Her name sounded altered somehow
In this microphone. Corrected again, it was
No longer such a modest device.
Ah, she nodded. More to learn.
Her words were the same however,
And the people who came to see her
Were transitory outsiders. Where had they gone,
Her friends, her crowd?
And then, in the darkness, she recollected –
The scent of horses. How strange to have forgotten.

Passage

There's something to be said,
One person whispered to another,
About a woman like Xael. No family,
And yet...
The strangers turned to the full room.
The air burst and popped with chatter.
No desolation, no absent beat.
Words and verse, shared and spread,
Like butter on wholegrain toast.
Xael's favourite.