

*Uncertain Alchemy*

4.

Quiet chopped kindling. She swept, she picked from the garden and weeded, she washed clothes by hand. The aunties didn't trust her to cook.

After one morning's breakfast dishes Quiet took her place on the porch bench. When Doris laid down for her morning nap Vernita joined her, handed off one of two bowls, and put a bucket of rust-and-green beans between them. They broke off bean tips, peeled back the threads, ran a thumb along the velveteen hollows.

"You need to be in touch." The thunk and patter of Vernita's shelling continued over a grasshopper's piercing seesaw.

Quiet looked out at the garden as her thumb, still a little stiff, stroked the silky trough of an empty pod. Pyramids of dusty vines, tomatoes bright as blood, golden blotches of squash between broad and faded leaves; she could tell Vernita was looking out at the garden too, so she shook her head silently. No.

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