

Kintsugi

Mei Rao - Workshop Piece

There's a Japanese technique known as *kintsugi*. It's an art of repairing broken ceramics. The potter will join the pieces together with lacquer and precious metals like gold or silver, so the seams are visible, so they're pretty. The jagged edges, the shape of the shards, the shattering, the repair, the whole entire history: it all becomes a part of the piece in the end.

I wear slippers in the house. Ian wears frayed wool socks. But most of the apartment basically goes barefoot, including Sam. It's unfortunate because he's a bit accident-prone, bless his soul. Sometimes my roommates will mess around, trying to climb around the apartment without touching the floor. It's as alarming as it is hysterical. So I see Sam scale the walls like this somewhat hairy, gangly, six-foot spider, managing to knock a cup off the table in the process, and as the glass becomes undone against the ground, I realize two things: I'm the one who has to clean up the mess. And I will miss this too.

I *really* don't like to kill bugs. Especially not spiders; spiders are definitely friends. I'm deathly afraid of anything with more than four legs-- I can't be in the same room as a bug on the wall-- but still. Something feels wrong about ending an insect. I mean, these are real creatures, creatures who have seen, felt, breathed, *lived*. I think about how much a hand, a human hand, can hurt. I think about how quickly, really, you can end things. I think about how very easy it is to undo so much.

Sometimes, the thinking is enough to keep me up at night. Thinking leads to remembering. Recalling. Recalling the shattering, the scattering. New and old too much the same. Gold lacquer disintegrating, the shards reassembling, seams stitching back together, a smooth, ceramic whole, only to once again hurtle towards the floor as fast as the first time. Reverse kintsugi in horrible, unstoppable motion.

When my roommates see me having breakfast, they know I haven't slept at all. It's almost code. Like a metaphor. Like cutting onions. Or just as familiar. Like an egg, opened. Runny flesh whisked into a singular solution. The tines of my fork tinging out the same old tune against the smooth, ceramic bowl. The same old butter, the same old pan. The same old omelette, now gently solid. Ian puts the kettle on. "Want some tea?"

he squints, a hint of his most recent dreams and yesterday's air still riding on his breath. I nod and we talk about the Parallel Programming project and World of Warcraft and worlds that are close to us and ones that are very, very far away. Sam is in the background, slamming a door to get to class as fast as humanly possible. It's impressive. I look through the window. The sunlight, brushing gold past the barren tree branches, pools in my veins. Streaks along my skin. And of course, I will miss this too.

In the wintertime, tree branches twist into the sky, those segmented coils curling, spreading, *something*, like some unfinishable puzzle. And staring up at the tangled mess while walking around the trunk does not help provoke an epiphany. Angle after angle, the geometry shifts slightly. Edges will suddenly line up with edges. Limbs will rearrange themselves in parallel. Ligneous curves will greet their asymptotes. But for every understanding that forms, another breaks. Total chaos is conserved. And yet, it feels like the perfect angle *has* to exist, a spot you can stand and look up and the branches will line up *just* right, and the clutter will give way to some hidden text, or some giant glowing arrow, or any kind of realization that will help you move on.

People see in different ways. For example, how I see hands in the brambles, scratching, grabbing, pulling, and suddenly I am in a world very, very far away, covered in thorns. Or how my father will try to read his desperate black-red handprints across my cheek, and somehow, hidden deep within the massive text, he will still find his youngest son. Or how the very same blood that once seemed so much thicker than water as it burst beneath the skin, over and over, as it pooled and darkened beneath the skin, over and over-- that which once seemed so much thicker than water is now as light as a fine red cloud hovering over the head of its source wherever she goes.

There are things that repair as much as there are things that break. The two are inevitable, inseparable. Like the moments that will always be missed, and the ones that, no matter what, can never be erased. Inevitable, inseparable, ingrained in fracture, in lacquer, and in eternity.