Cassandra entered through a metal cap on the ground, climbing down a rusty brown ladder into a home that pulsed with life. As she walked to the kitchen, she ran her fingers over the moist, tuberous cross-beams, smelled the slick wall-paper. Cold bedrock scratched her heels as she walked. When she reached the kitchen, she sat on her redwood stump for a long time. She had arranged it so that she could sit while she contemplated what snack she wanted from the pantry, often she would arrive and not know what she wanted for ten minutes, so she prepared for that possibility.

Later, as she washed and chopped some carrots and potatoes, she felt some slithery mud drip onto her cheek, she wiped it off with her finger, and another appeared, dripping cold on her nose. She looked up, and saw shining black hole in the ceiling. Leaks were always dangerous, they could let the water seep in above, and pull her house down piece by piece. Cassandra quickly placed her food on the wooden counter and climbed outside, the grey light through the storm hit her hard and fast, and she screwed her eyes shut.

The land above her was covered in flat shale stones that she had painstakingly broken so that they fit together like tiles. Over previous leaks she had placed yet more stones, so that the roof formed small peaks. She liked the crunching sound they made as she shuffled them around and nearly got distracted but she stopped herself. Despite this, she could not find the leak.

Out of the corner of her eye a sliver of long brown hair slid into view. She looked up to see cool blue eyes and neon slippery clothing. A thin white woman knelt next to her.

“Hey, do you need help fixing something?” She had soft eyes and a hard jawline and her voice sounded like it had been sanded down on all the corners. Round, like her house. Cassandra couldn’t explain fully what she needed, there weren’t the right words, and every time, the woman would look more and more incredulous.

Cassandra just shuffled away and down the door to her home, she locked it behind her, even though she could hear the woman clearly saying “goodbye then!” as she left. While she undressed and got ready for sleep, she caught sight of two black beetles crawling up the wall of the bedroom, one followed the other very closely, so closely its antennae brushed the hard wing cap of the other.

The next morning, she woke up and ate breakfast. It took her a long time to eat her food, she couldn’t tell if she wanted it or not, her stomach didn’t seem to mind, but it also didn’t actively cry for it. Was she only eating because she wanted something to do? Something to distract her from the way that slippery woman had looked at her?

The leak was still a leak though, and it had to be fixed. She could still hear a slight patter of rain on the roof, so she stood in the kitchen waiting for the drop to fall. She had a stick in her hand, if all went to plan she could shove it through the hole and see the stick from the top. But the drop never came.

Cassandra shrugged on another brown layer of wool and clambered outside again, what she had thought was rain had been the sound of sneakers on stone. The slippery bright woman sat crouched with a thin white can and some flat shiny tool.
She looked all around her for somewhere to hide, or perhaps a weapon, but was paralyzed with indecision. All at once the woman stood up and Cassandra was assaulted with kind and bashful words. Words she had never heard before, like spackle and caulk. Then the mysterious woman fell silent for a moment, as if waiting for Cassandra to speak, and so she pointed at the fresh puddle of white goop and crouched there too, examining and smelling the strange new substance. When she looked up at the woman with the slick clothes, she smiled without meaning to. The woman smiled back.

Before she knew it, somehow she had invited the woman in, or the woman had invited herself in, for tea from the garden. As she lead her down the hall, she felt bashful and ashamed at the dirtiness of the place. She hadn’t cleaned in so long, hadn’t pressed the walls back in so that the dirt didn’t fall, hadn’t trimmed the roots that surrounded them. But still, she felt the damp and thriving life and it invigorated her. She felt a surge of pride as the woman looked around, mouth agape, that she had built this.

“It’s so dark,” the woman said in wonder. Cassandra didn’t understand, she had lit some of the candles and left the hatch open, she could see anything she needed to. But the woman shivered as though the mud walls had traced a finger down her neck. Perhaps it was dark, Cassandra lit another candle.

The woman drank tea with her in silence, her eyes were calculating as she surveyed the room. Though the woman made Cassandra nervous, she felt a zing of exhilaration at having her there, by her nature she was weary of strangers, but the woman made her feel comfortable and safe, she wanted to share things with her.

In the wall, she saw the dirt move as a worm writhed and swam through the muck.

Every day after, the woman would stop by for a quick drink. Cassandra began to look forward to the visits, and eventually to rearrange her schedule around them. The woman was unnervingly punctual, and she never overstayed.

But then things started to change, the woman began to help with clean up, even as Cassandra hushed her and wrung her hands, saying that she didn’t need to, that she was the guest and so... But the woman would have none of it. And then one day, she came with a trowel. Cassandra knew it was a trowel because the woman held it in front of her face and said the words very slowly, as she widened her eyes. Cassandra was properly grateful.

The woman used the trowel to scrape at the walls, which brought a shower of dirt down on her long beautiful hair. Cassandra laughed, but went quiet as the woman very seriously went back to work. She scraped for hours, carving sharp corners into the walls to define the ceiling. Cassandra never had a ceiling before.

The next day, the woman brought long sticks, she placed them along the walls and hooked them into place with wires. Cassandra sat, drank her tea and watched. The woman took some goop in a large can and began spreading that on the walls too. When she finished, she sat with Cassandra and took tea, smiling in a self-satisfied way. Cassandra smiled back, though there was a weakness to it that wasn’t there before. Entire walls were now white and hard. But the woman placed her small smooth hand on hers and smiled, looking directly in her eyes. All of Cassandra’s misgivings melted away.
The next day, she came in with pastel paints and small nails. She painted every wall, and Cassandra supposed she liked it. She wondered where her chunky roots had gone, and if they could breathe under the paint and hard coating. The woman bashed the nails in the wall with a rock and then drank her tea.

The next day, Cassandra woke up early. Out of habit, she brushed her hand along the wall as she walked to the kitchen. There was nothing to feel, save the obtrusive round nails that she could see no purpose for. It was rough to her fingers, and she could not penetrate it. When the woman came that day, she tried to wave off her attempts to add rectangles to the walls and door. The woman smiled as she wrung Cassandra’s hands and hushed her worries away. She gave her a big, tight hug, and proceeded to scrape the dirt and rocks around the metal cap into a rectangle, and she climbed up, pushing a used door from someone else’s home. Someone else’s life.

Cassandra smiled weakly and tried to focus on something else, anything else. The best she could find was a crack in the wall, which the woman covered with a rectangle.

Every day she woke up, and some part of her home was different, and every day she faded, until she felt like part of the steam from her tea. But the woman seemed to think this was more normal, that Cassandra was beginning to be happier. The woman had started wearing less shiny, less slippery clothes. They were warmer now, more functional for sitting and talking, rather than moving.

But Cassandra felt like moving. She felt the need in a way that she never had before. But every time the woman looked at her, she felt as though she was being washed over. There was no ground.

And so the next day, she woke up and walked out, and when she came back, she couldn’t open the door. So she left the woman in her plaster cave. She knew it was called plaster because the woman had waved it in front of her face and widened her eyes, saying the word until Cassandra had repeated it back to her.

The air was warm and humid, the trees were heavy with sweat and she walked out. She walked until she could no longer find her way back to the old house. In the sky, there were no clouds, but wind warned of a storm. She found in a few minutes, a meadow with short grass.

She descended and dug her nails into the wet dirt. She clawed at it as flecks sprayed up at her cheeks and lips. Cassandra laughed, and the dirt kept flying as she burrowed deeper. She laughed, and tiny pieces of dirt could be seen in the crevices between her hard teeth.