

Amelia

by stephen hastings-king

1. Elsewhere, alone, stranded on an atoll, far, Amelia is being eaten by crabs.

2. When she crawled out of the water they turned in her direction and began to wait. Every time she tries to sleep they come; legions of small armored things scuttle claws aloft across the purple sand as soon as she stops moving.

The presence or absence of a fire neither attracts nor repels.

3. Day follows night always the same: the sun, the three trees that provide no shade, the search for food and movement along the horizon, signals without reception and a dwindling supply of wood, then darkness, awake and waiting, day after day the same on this sand crescent nowhere visited by no-one except the fading famous aviator and an army of crabs.

4. When she gives in, she dreams of aeroplanes speeding down brightly lit runways and flying over fields populated with rows of pastries, performing loops and barrel rolls in the air behind glass like fish in an aquarium. Every plastic pilot sees another and gives the thumbs up; everyone's grand adventure is cheered on by nuns and napoleons.

When she gives in, she is a machine covered with small moving dials that emits transparent bursts of pain that dissolve immediately into the stasis of afternoon.

5. In the subsequent history of the atoll, Amelia is the name on a lighter among fragments of bone.

