

Crucible

by [Marda Messick](#) in the [January 2023](#) issue

At a pottery inland from the tourist beach, a crowd arrives for the annual unloading of the wood-burning kilns.

There's a fiddle and guitar, the spice of chili cooking outdoors. Stacks of split wood, cinders in the fireboxes. Sand and ash underfoot.

Light falls a little way into the cold kilns and we see the ware packed tight as seed heads,
a closet of surprises. We want it all laid before us like gifts for a king.

There was a transforming fire inside the fire bricks, a fiercesome heat that did not consume,
white-glowing mineral alchemy, mystic. Fashion a thing, consign it to the furnace. Trust.

We form a receiving line as the pieces now safe to touch pass hand to hand,
handling
the hand-made with care, leaving all our fingerprints on the glaze. Exclaiming,
amazed.

Sometimes when a little one is baptized the people pass her through the church like that, tender.
Seeing her astonishing, new-made.

When you go through the fire next time, if I'm near, let me not fear to touch you,
your pure
charred beauty. And mine.