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That Moment

by Victoria Cooper

I hold my breath. I try to suck back the words that angered you; the poorly cooked meal or the smile I gave to someone other than you. No matter how much I try to swallow these down I am paralysed with that moment. That moment of waiting. Your spittle on my chin. I wait. I do not blink, breathe or move. You tell me over and over and over how tired I make you as my teeth jangle inside my head.

“You’re a little scary sometimes, you know that?”

It’s not when your fist connects with my cheek. It’s not when you shout and call me names. You’re not even scary when you pin me down, though your head looks too big for your body. It’s the pause. The wait. It’s the few seconds before your pupils dilate and your hot, hot breath envelopes my face. I am engulfed by you and I know it’s that single moment when the hands around my neck and on the clock stop simultaneously.

I am your song thrush and while I sing, I lay my lily-white throat bare to you. Loud and unbroken, yet I am ignored. That is the moment, the moment you are scary and it is also the moment when I know you are going to hurt me.

After you stroke my hair and your tears wash with my own, I try to remember how love used to feel. I don’t remember it feeling like this. I have watched happiness trickle out the windows and slide from under doors. All that remains now are the shards of glass wrapped in newspaper lying at the bottom of the dustbin; piece them together and I am the person I once was. If only I could be her again, that girl, the one you fell for. The one who promised to sail away with you, away from your raging storm, but to steady the wheel I must first calm these trembling fingers.

“I’m not scary,” you say, “only monsters are scary.”