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The Lizard That Lived Forever

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SARA RYAN

THE LIZARD THAT LIVED FOREVER

- Winner: *Big Sky, Small Prose Flash Contest* -

I HATE TO SAY that I dream about men, but I do. about men who have gone off and married other girls. moved to other colonial houses in Virginia. it is like strapping the tree branch to my bicycle and riding until I become concrete.

•

Monday drew a circle around me and lit it on fire. Wednesday learned my name and spit it onto my lap.

•

I scrub an opal earring with a wire brush and it turns to gold in my hands. I have dug it out of a dead woman's pink jewelry box. I was born in October, and I feel like I need to polish all of the opals that ever existed.

•

this morning, a man walks into the store where I work and tells me he is an ordained minister. he asks to see an antique straight razor and cradles the carved handle in his hands like a small bird.

•

the truth is, my sister will not feed the pet lizard so the crickets jump around

our house like small flickers of light. they sing to each other. the lizard jumps from our palms as though she has never been afraid. when she dies, she curls under a rock and turns to dust. we bury her in the backyard as though we loved her.

•

when the man at the store tells me what he thinks of my body, I want to tell him that I haven't been touched in three years. maybe I am lying. maybe this is the struggle he speaks of.

•

I think about my sister's lizard. how we named her a name I don't remember. I think about how she lived longer than all the other lizards. I think about the strange scars left behind on my body; their pale and vicious takeover. the part I do remember: applying medicine every night, peeling off the scab in the morning, and doing it all over again. and again.

•

I see the man again. and this time, I shrink into a hummingbird. I try to laugh at his jokes and show my teeth. what he doesn't know is that I feel all the poison. I smell it on his skin. on his scabby arms. his combat boots are laced tight and tall as though they have never left his feet.

•

maybe a stranger is someone I have never met. maybe he takes a picture of me without my permission. maybe he is 5 beers deep and reeks of smoke. maybe a stranger owns my body, in some sick and unfair way. he knows what will make me move down the bar. he knows what will make me shift

in my seat until my dress becomes a chrysalis.

•

this is to say: I have never forgiven myself for the times I smiled when I should have screamed. for the men who asked when they knew the answer. the last time I saw you, I ran through the parking lot like a deer caught in the line of fire. of course, I could just take the blindfold off. of course, I could just let you shoot me and it'd all be over.

•

before the overgrown lawn. before the man. before all the men. before I buried my trust in the sea. before I ate a fig for the first time and it felt like a universe found its way into my mouth. I never knew survival like that. how to say thank you but with needles in your teeth.

•

in the end—all dust. the lizard. the rusty razorblade. we have all known too many cheeks. we have all known too many men who will tell us what they think without caring at all.

•

I will never forget what you said to me when you left: you begged me to stop speaking. you begged me to stop saying your name.