

Forget-Me-Not

By Jennifer Ly

TW: Mentions of domestic violence

The Forget-Me-Nots are plastic. They only bloom in spring, you see. And summer wilts them fast. But the cool air of fall can't wilt fake flowers. They rest in a small blue vase on my nightstand. I could have sworn that vase was red. I can't remember my dream last night. I can't remember yesterday either. I'll have to ask him. He says my memory hasn't been the same since the car accident. I look in the mirror and see a cut on my lip and a bruise on my head. It stings to the touch. There's a bump behind my ear just under the skin tucked beneath a stitched scar. It's cold to the touch—a spot of steel amidst my warm skin. I haven't seen the car today. He says it's in the garage being fixed. I didn't know he could fix cars. But he fixes me breakfast. I'm sitting at the table, staring at a face made with egg eyes and a bacon smile. The plate has sunflowers on the edges. He sips coffee from a chipped mug. He likes damaged things—even more so if he damaged them himself. He says he's saving them from being discarded. He kisses my forehead before he goes to the front door to get the newspaper. I wince before his lips brush against my bruise.

I set out your dress for you upstairs.

He finishes his paper. I finish one egg. I cut the other one. The yolk spills like blood from a wound. I lose my appetite, he loses his page—the newspaper rustles. The paper droops like a cloth handkerchief. It's more yellow than black and white. A brown stain bleeds through the center like an old wound. The corner screams October 31st. The house isn't decorated.

Where's the candy for the kids?

I thought I liked Halloween. He gets up to go to the garage. I get up to clean my plate. I open the trash. Broken red glass. I wash my dish, but there are more in the basin. A field of sunflowers fills the sink. The orange sponge feels odd—there's something in the middle. There's a cut in the sponge. In the cut, a curled paper in a plastic bag.

"You will forget."

The garage door slams. The paper goes back into the sponge. Can't you see I'm washing the dishes?

Sweetie, why aren't you dressed yet? Words like sour candy. Speaking of which-

Why don't we have candy out for the kids?

I will get the candy later.

I can't look at him—Why can't I look at him?

Fine, I'll get the candy now.

He walks toward the pantry. My dress is upstairs. To get to the stairs, you pass the front door and the hallway of pictures. I see a picture of me in a dress of Forget-Me-Nots next to him. There's a hole in the wall next to the picture frame. The front door has 3 locks on it. I thought we lived in a safe neighborhood. I wear the dress. It's the dress from the picture—it smells of sweat and feels too soft. These must be my favorite flowers. I go downstairs. The front door is open. He goes outside, putting a bowl on the front step. I slam the door shut. I lock all three locks.

Let me back in.

He has to be calm or the neighbors will hear. I haven't seen the car today. I run to the garage. The handle will not budge. I fall to the floor. Nothing to the left. To the right is the washing machine. But in the crevice between the wall and the machine—a screwdriver. I can't pick a lock with this. I turn the screwdriver over. It has writing on the handle.

"Hinges."

I unscrew the hinges. The door falls into the garage like a tree in a still forest. I see the car. It doesn't have a scratch. The keys share the table space with a computer and keyboard. This keyboard was funny. It only had one button-

“Restart.”

The cold behind my ear sears through my skin like a knife made of ice. Grab the keys, start the car. The radio startles me.

Happy Monday, everyone! With Thanksgiving next week, be sure to pick up those Butterballs early!

It has not been Halloween for weeks. The garage curls open.

I didn't open it.

He stands there. In front of the car. My bruise stings. The bowl never had candy in it.

I floor it.

He hits the hood and rolls over the car. I see him fall in the rearview. The side mirror tells me he stopped moving. Blood pools like spilled yolk. I keep driving. Nobody has Halloween decorations out. I look in the rearview one last time. He's not on the floor anymore. He is kneeling by the computer. He slams the button. I wake up and see on my nightstand—

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