

Two Flash Fictions

Claire Arneson

Pieces of Me

Our eyes met first.
Right outside your family's café.
I remember the yellow flecks that graced the vast ocean of your right eye and the dirt brown of your left.
Mine tentatively touched your dimple as you smirked my way.
I blushed, my grass eyes turning back to the menu in front of me.
"Go talk to him!"
I glanced at Cassie, the homework we brought untouched.
"Just go, Kelly."
I stand up.
I walk towards you.
My breath is static.
Our eyes greet each other for the second time, and I veer toward the bathroom.
I close the door and look in the mirror.
My rose hair is clenched between my fingers, and my cheeks are tomato red.
"Breathe Kells, breathe."
"Good idea," you say.
And I turn to look up into your eyes.
"I'm Barrett."

*

The first time you held my hand was at the football game.

We had just scored or made a goal, or... I don't know, I just went to spend time with you.

You stood up and cheered, I stood up too, and clapped my cold dry hands.

You gave me your jacket, the cold nipping at my skin, but you noticed. My hands felt empty, until you stopped my clapping, and grasped my left.

Your thumb rubbed circles, heating up the frigid outer layer. And then our eyes met again.

*

Do you remember when you first kissed me?

I do.

We were at Cassie's Halloween party; you took me outside.

We went as Casey Becker and Ghostface from *Scream*.

I was unbothered by the noise, by the indecent PDA that was being displayed, I just wanted you alone.

And then you kissed me.

You parted my lips with yours, you held my neck, and you pulled me by my waist.

And I kissed you.

*

When I sprained my ankle, you carried me throughout the house.

You transported me upstairs, downstairs, and back again.

You put me to bed, kissing my eyes, my hands, my lips, and my ankle.

"Feel better, I'll see you tomorrow."

*

Do you remember our last kiss?

I do.

We were in my bed, watching *Scream*.

My ankle was propped on the two pillows you insisted I needed.

Your hand around my neck, my head on your arm.

And your other hand... trailing up my leg.

"Barrett..."

"Come on, Kelly."

It went higher and higher.
And you leaned in to kiss me.
No, you leaned in to own me
You started forcing me.
"Not now, Barrett."
"Please Kelly, I have been so patient."
And then you got on top of me.
"No! Get off!"
My parents rushed into the room.
I bet you forgot they were here.
Sometimes I do, too.
They kicked you out, told you to leave.
I texted you that night.
But you didn't.

*

"Barrett?"
Your face is disguised by your Halloween costume.
The once-fake knife you had, is replaced by a real one.
"What are you doing?"
I only knew it was you, by your eyes.
Your eyes, that hold pieces of me.
"It'll be over soon."

*

Do you remember when you killed me?
I do.
You killed me in my very own bed, while my parents were sleeping in the
other room.
You killed me and cut me up, wrapping me in my own bed sheets.
You threw my eyes in the trash behind your parent's restaurant.
You buried my hands under the bleachers of our school's stadium.
You buried my head in Cassie's backyard.
And you threw the rest of me into the river.
But you kept my heart.
You have my heart.

In-Between

Hazel Rhoads. Loving grandmother, mother, and wife.

Daisies decorate me. They flower around me. They sprinkle more and more on top of me. The rain is forgotten, and the sun is a mere second away, but they are still here.

I am still here.

My family is still here.

The graveyard they chose is nice. It's decorated with the taste of spring and is littered with the tears of mourners. Relevant people or sporadic souls wander through here and cry for ones they do not know. My headstone blends with the others beside me. And describes me, Hazel Rhoads, in three basic words. Words I don't remember knowing. Next to me lies my great-grandfather. A man I hardly knew, but someone I know now. And my wife to my right. She beat me to greeting death by two years, but I see her again.

I am with her again.

Heaven and hell are nowhere in our sights. We hold hands above our graves and look over our children. Our son and daughter. Our accomplishments and our failures are composed into the melody of these two extraordinary human beings. They hold hands, their spouses at their sides, their children beside them. And they watch us.

They cannot see us.

They can't hear the joy in my tone as I reach for my loved ones. The ones I had only dreamed of seeing again if I had gotten into heaven. But here there is no euphoria. There is no utopia the pastors and preachers spoke about. And there is no dark despair in a pit. There is just the in-between. Where you are both happy and sad. Where there are both good days and bad days. My wife and I fight, but we also love. We still cry and mourn, but we know they are just around the bend.

My children are just around the bend.

They are walking away now. Heads held low, but hands held to their sides. The wisp of the winds blows the scent of daisies through the

air. My grandson, turns around, just for a glimpse. We wave, and laugh. And I swear he smiles, and waves back. I turn to my wife. My gorgeous wife.

My life was a matter of letters and numbers. My name condensed into a mere whisper of syllables put together. Counting down the days, speaking a prayer to anyone who would listen. Hoping for serenity. Asking for peace. 90 years old is a long time to live. It's a long time to force a breath every morning when you wake up. Every morning when you wake alone in an empty bed. Every evening when you go to sleep, wondering if you would wake up. But one day you don't wake up in an empty bed. You wake up in your first house. The house holds so many memories. I wake up with her next to me.

"Took ya long enough," she smirks. Reaching her hand out to me.

We are now holding hands above our graves, our old brick house appearing behind us. The porch is decked with a pitcher of iced tea, and two books for us to read. Nothing is said, but I know once we get to the porch we cannot go back. We cannot be close to our children, but instead must observe from a birds-eye view. She squeezes my hand.

"It's time, Hazel."

So we turn to leave. To go to our in-between.

Claire Arneson is a junior at the University of North Dakota. She is studying English and communications and hopes to work in the publishing industry in the future. She loves reading all of the books she can, and cheers the loudest at the hockey game.