Heroes

by Emily Smith-Miller

he's bent over the shards, the widow broken, the pane bloody. he's shaking, isn't he shaking though? so hard the rest of the glass begins to fall around him, a slow motion rainfall of crystal reality. he leans back against the wall, his hyperventilation running smoothly with the shivering tears. his eyes are a sadness unknown, undissolved, refined, and vulnerable. the brown stained yellow note, it's almost shredded in his fixed grasp, the nails biting his palm, the shattered clarity cutting him on impact. the widow, the door, the house, the last day he ever knew what it was like to be in love. he thought he was the hero, he thought he rescued the girl. this wasn't something that happened to heroes, it never happened to them this way: folded note, table top, drop the flowers, punch a hole in sanity, hit your knees, covered in dripping open wounds, winding red down your arms. no that wasn't him, that wasn't him who needed to be saved there on the new tile, he had never needed a burning savior to wrap him closely in their embrace. he was . . . he was stronger, he thought he was so much stronger. he had lifted her up, her fragility exciting, he held her, he rocked her. in the storms, he weathered her fear and rage. in the nightmares, he pulled her away from the dark place. now it was he in the eye, no one told him there was a place where heroes died, but he should have known it was in love, that it was her love, that took the final stab in black ashes. threw him off the coast of Crimea. she had a Ukrainian heart, icy and flirtatious, delicate, and so much like the winters of a soul, totalitarian and demanding, encompassing. his hands rattled, the bones trying to free themselves, her Ottoman Empire had conquered his being, his righteousness, and self-respect. it was a battle he had not known he was fighting. the killing blow, it was in red ink, on a cringing sheet of mercilessness. he knew this feeling, he'd been told about it. he'd been told about the moment you lose your humanity, when you gave yourself away to a reckless happiness, blasphemer, worshipping peach nipples and white blonde hair. loving something more than

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altruistic divinity, sacrilege. the statue of her on the pedestal of his interior self, toppling his belief in goodness, throttling all faith, leaving a bitter cave of a once brave and magnanimous man, ruined in her wake