

Freeing Annabel Lee

by M. Barns

It drifted into the sea, I say, when you ask me about home. You've only known me for a few moments, so you're not sure how to gauge me. You laugh, and make an *Annabel Lee* reference. The English teacher in me wants to hug you. The New Jersey in me wants to hit you. To drag my fingers across your skin, to leave ruts in your flesh, to make you feel like I feel.

So I walk away. You ask if you said something wrong. *I didn't lie*, I say. *My memories were eaten by the sea*. You frown and wait to see if I am being metaphorical. I count seven Mississippi in my head before you break the silence. *Just how does one's memories get eaten by the sea*, you ask. You're smirking and I want to tell you that I came into the store for technical assistance. Not conversation. That you should just fix my cell phone and stop staring at my legs.

But I don't. I want to make you uncomfortable. I want you to go home tonight and struggle with guilt. I want you to fall in love with the tragic nature of my smile, and how I look the most beautiful when I'm falling apart. *It was the hurricane*, I said. *That bitch, Sandy*. You get quite and go back to fixing my phone. *Did you lose anyone*, you question. *Not people*, I counter. *Just memories. Just things. Just homes and cars and pictures and wedding dresses that were meant to be passed down, and a book that I had meant to read, handwriting of loved ones that I meant to save*. I stop to catch my breath, and look him directly in the eye. *I only lost my sense of home*.

You finish fixing my phone and tell me about the boxer you rescued. You tell me you know what it's like to feel lost. You ask me if I think people meet for a reason. *I think people are made of stardust*, I say. *I think some of us more so than others*. You smile and say you see the stardust in me. I know you don't. *I think I need to stop seeing home as a place*, I say, *maybe my home is in the people I share that place with*.

He smiles, and writes his number down on a post-it. *Call me*, he says. *We can talk about this deep shit later. I'll buy you a drink, or maybe dinner.* I watch as he watches me. He sees my fractures as a challenge. He sees my body as something that can be conquered.

I drop the post-it to the ground outside of the building. The night is cold but it doesn't seem to help with the air that feels stuck in my lungs. I pull my phone from my pocket and dial my friend. The one who painted the neighborhood kid's faces with me when we were seven to earn movie money. The one who I shared my sweet sixteen with. The one who understands my new definition of the word home. *Hi*, I say. *Hi*, she says, questioning me. *What's the matter, why is your voice shaking.* I pause for a moment, trying to simplify my thoughts. *The Atlantic stole my security. It stole my home.*

I know, I know, she says. And I know she is picturing the same memories drowning in the sea. I know she knows. And for now, that has to be enough. For now I know we'll have to be each other's home.

