

Hollow

by Paula Ray

His mouth is a flesh cave where a grizzly slumbers and winter is the blank page of my face. We danced beneath a cherry blossom tree when the weather tricked us into believing flowers and seeds promised a future. I tiptoe now. It's best that way. The traces of my body disappear into the snow.

We don't talk about the possibility anymore. My clouds have stopped forming balloon animals and I've never been good at reading his smoke signals. It's best that way.

Sometimes, I think he might roll over and look me in the eye, but I find comfort in the rhythm of his spine—vertebrae all lined in a row with their rigid points buried under fur, unlike mine. I have a crooked brittle backbone that sways in the slightest breeze. It couldn't hold up to the pressure, I tell myself.

I write vanishing names in the sand with a splintered limb and collect shells like memories—searching for the unbroken. Yesterday, I found a piece of sea-glass. For a moment, I thought it was a portal into why. I stared into its foggy-green-translucent belly and said her unborn name. It echoed in my empty womb.

