

THREESOME

Claire Guyton

Sarah had wanted to meet so she could apologize for using the sock puppet to break up with me. 'I was sure that if it came from Lemonade,' she said, 'you would hear it ... better. *Softer*. Isn't that right, Lemonade?'

He nodded, his terrycloth rabbit ears flopping pink against the white cotton sock.

I didn't want to look at the tidy chocolate stitching of his eyes, get caught in the light reflected by the polished, black-button nose. So I focused on his bowtie, felted gray wool with fuchsia dots. Always turned just slightly to the left or right, his ties. Today, left.

I looked past him, past Sarah, and curled my fingers around the too-hot cup of cappuccino. Months fell away, and my chest split along the breastbone.

Softer, yes. Soft as a bruised tomato, tender as torn skin.

'If I'd kept the dynamic simpler ...' Sarah shrugged. 'Anyway, we hurt you, and we're both really sorry. Aren't we, Lemonade?'

Again his ears jounced up and down. 'We love you, Joe,' said Lemonade, in his high, creaky voice.

In early morning, when all was underwater-quiet, Lemonade's pre-caffeinated ears hung straight and still. If he was angry the ears would lift and fall, like trembling breath. But most of the time, they *danced*. While he told stories, made jokes. Sang.

Oh, and talk about soft. Just the right kind, like a raindrop in June, like a pre-dawn whisper. A kind of soft my fingers, clutching the hard porcelain, yearned for.

I managed to keep my voice steady: 'I love you, too, Lemonade.'

No regrets, I told them. It's just hard, now, to be alone.

Hard like a cracked window, like a broken sidewalk. Like the taste of overcooked metal that a cold cup of cappuccino leaves in the back of your mouth.