

Fold

By Michelle Pugh

Azrail Dallon never thought of himself as the kind of guy to find love at all. When he was younger all he remembered was people always telling him that he would never get a girlfriend, that he would never marry. He was antisocial, he was ugly, they told him. But he never cared much about love anyway. He had other things on his mind— when he was twelve he developed a fascination with paper; the way it folded, the way it floated in the breeze. When a sheet of plain white paper was crumpled, it lost its ability to fly. When it was destroyed, torn up into shreds, it flew again. While all the other teenagers befriended each other and spent time playing in the park or laughing at the movies, Azrail would sit in his room in his worn-out brown wooden chair, examining sheets of paper, folding them, tearing them. He would create shapes with them and then unfold and refold them into more shapes. The paper in front of him was no longer a flat sheet— now it was a flower. Now a crane, now an elephant, now a cat. His room began to fill with origami creatures, sometimes so many there was barely enough room for him to breathe. Often at night they would come to life and Azrail knew that he would never care about whether he made any friends because his animals would always be there for him.

Now, Azrail lived in a town much too small for his folded creatures. Paper had lost its magical glimmer. A paper crane sitting on a desk at work was no longer a shimmering white bird but just a piece of origami. His life was dreary and never-ending. For his colleagues, they had partners and spouses to look forward to when they got home. Azrail returned home every evening to an empty apartment and bare furniture.

The night he received the call from the lab he went to the window and gazed out upon the neighborhood. During the daytime the sunlight draped the town in a golden syrup, but ever since his childhood Azrail had been enraptured by the silvery shadow that the moon cast over everything after sundown. The air was still that night, and in the darkness the world seemed silent and sad.

As the months went on, Azrail began to fade. He stopped going to work and instead spent his time in his home at his barren desk, in his barren chair. To occupy the time he took up folding and tearing paper, creating shapes and animals with them, but he never kept any of his creations. He would fold a flower, then crumple it and toss it in the wastebasket by his side. Then a crane, then an elephant. Each would ultimately end up in the trash. It wasn't that he detested them, he just had no need for the creatures in his life. The basket filled to the brim so he began to carelessly drop them on the floor nearby. He often would just sit there quietly and allow himself to become lost in his own thoughts.

In four months, Azrail would slowly relinquish life, just as he had been told he would, in the local hospital by an immense window that overlooked the town, as he watched the sun set and the moon rise and cast the magical blanket over the world— over his life— and he would watch thousands of strips of paper dance in the night sky, swirling before his eyes, floating above the world, before he was set free.