

SHORT STORY

# jawbreaker

by Gamze S. Saymaz



"The Timely House" by Rebecca Pyle

## *chapter one: mattie rettig doesn't write love songs*

it's so crowded under your skin. but bones only crack in the frequency of haunted house pillars. dog whistle. when you believe alone in physics. perhaps the perks of peach pit palms and spaced-out speech. cohabitation as party game. mattie rettig you'll come undone one of these days.

it has always been so crowded over your skin too. precisely the same amount of crowded. first you thought the dust on the floor was pixie. your mum has always complained about where all of that comes from. surely some faraway land where you never have to grow old and complain about where all the dust comes from. your house was magic.

then you saw way too many horror flicks for someone your age not to break the spell. salt the spell.

set the spell

on fire. your house was built on some ancient burial ground and the dead were either too sacred or too greedy. you are now nineteen and you think

it's just a glitch. it's someday somewhere something gone wrong. coordinates not cursed but crooked. curving a different way than the rest. someday somewhere something went wrong and the universe skipped this one insignificant house when it was putting everything in order. a beat. a lazy day. a gingersnap in half. thought couple crumbs under the table wouldn't make any difference brushed aside no-one would notice. gulp. well the universe probably wasn't stopping and looking at what was making every sound under its feet anyway. dog whistle. some

multiverse matrix shit. some

cosmic mistake that would mean every inanimate thing that has ever been and ever will be inside the borders of this very house

has always been and always will be

inside the borders of this very house. all piled up laundry. nothing gets in even when they do. and surely nothing gets out. your house was painted fire brick and failed physics.

forty-eight chairs for a family of three. way too many legs. always gets in the way. it was a maze memorised when you were a baby. and every now and then one would get in your eye.

cry. wouldn't make any difference anyway. that old couch your parents got rid of when you were thirteen. and the other three. that one balloon no-one but you could ever see until you are four years old. and ever since you are four and six minutes. that one balloon you were gifted because you wouldn't stop talking about that one balloon stuck up on the ceiling. and you thought you would have two identical ones now which excited you. soon after that you stopped talking about things only you could see to spare yourself the disappointment and got into the habit of destroying things which only frustrated you further. everything was always there. it taught you to fake wow can't believe you got me this which you thought would be helpful in the future. it didn't teach you how to care though. everything was always there anyway. wouldn't make any difference when something breaks  
pops like a grape. capri sun.  
not to you.

yes you have always been a quick learner. pretend they are not there and your hand goes through them like nothing. child's play. cake. but some nights there are just way too many clothes on your bed. precisely the same amount of most not even yours. and you can feel the weight of each and every one of them. especially that coat with all the spots and the fuzz. mrs. brooks loved to show off. and you can't go to sleep. so you count everything in your room like dead sheep. 1 balloon. keeps you grounded. 4 desks. 5 dressers. 6 lamps. 7 teddy bears. 422 books. this is tedious. get up. walk around. try not to trip over. good distraction. trip over. get up. walk around. eyes shut. you've done this before. thread through. god how you wish you had the right kind of language to articulate the feeling of heavier or the feeling of restless when your chest doesn't fit between the chipped chest and the chest that chipped your tooth. the three-drawer chest and the six-drawer chest. it's always your chest. it's always everything's always there. is this how god feels. chop your hair. kitchen. chug a coke. choke on pasta for kicks. stomp on fragile signs. do it with care. fine bone china. beg for seconds. stomach sinks. which kitchen sink. no room to breathe. never any room to breathe. never any room tonight you can't go to sleep

because you can't seem to stop counting down from the not-yet-purchased. each *new* piece of furniture. mattie rettig your world ends in two coffee tables and six more pots of pansies your mum swears swore will swear she can nurture back to life. you lie lied will lie on the bed. skipped beats for lullaby. god how you wish those fit inside your chest. 1 balloon. 4 desks. 5 dressers. 6 lamps. 8 teddy bears.

## *chapter two: salt it and set it on fire*

climb all the chairs. grab the balloon. inhale. like a paper bag.

the universe mocks you for serving it milk. who would have taught the universe had pride.

this is a spill. don't take one. count everything. nine times. ten. the universe has a tongue with many forks forever forking anew and this must be one of them.

does this mean the house is back on the cosmogonic map.

exhale. the universe stops and sits down across from you. poker faced. a turn of the tables. of all four. oh and how so. a twist in its guts.

does this mean you get to negotiate time. time. tricky business. are you trickier mattie rettig. something

is different. makes all the difference. hunt down the next coffee table or get your mum some pansies.

## *chapter three: wings 22*

gaelle. she smacks her buffalo lips says i am not sad not really. dragging the sad hopefully out of its meaning. it is bound to happen she says. too much garlic. scrunches her nose. feels like every hair on your body buzzes tv static. snow screen. feels like if her buffalo fingers brush your arm with the right amount of pressure

as she scrunches her nose

your arm would surely break off and fall in her plate. frozen purple. bone and everything. she gets up tosses it into the microwave. dips it in blue cheese. smiles all buffalo teeth. you crush the other on the side of the table pop the fingers for popsicles blend the rest watermelon slushie. smiles. feels like minus six degrees. it's june.

2017.

june 2018. seasons

unlike your house

do not resent you. she clutches the pillow. turns her back on you all plush and puffed up. peach fuzz peeking through. silent. radio. you don't know what it was about her mouth that would suck in all the air from your lungs. swallow every second word you mutter and make you spit it out fruit flies

stuttering. you still wanna hold her. only not as tight. must be lust. leftovers. sweet rush.

blood. eight teddy bears is for

over her  
move on  
something else  
not her  
not her lungs.

you wonder if she knows. she clutches the pillow. turns her back on you. you want to dig holes under her eyes. plant violets and lilacs and lavenders. let them bloom. play nice. let's talk about this.

morning. crack eggs crack eyes what's the difference. double yolk. leaks. cries. omen. she wishes she could stop. you peel oranges knuckles dipping and rising in places coral reef does. it stings and it sizzles. she lets out a sighhhhhh so warm you think the kitchen is on fire again. tell me something she says. sirens. no the toaster. you bite your cheek. no bullshit do you think they know like can they see it on my face. imagine her with ink scratches on her forehead. sickly paper. stick and poke. hangman hangs himself he has had enough. there is only one vowel left. everyone knows. she wishes she could care less. care exactly as much as you care. that's why she loves you. you think if this is what it's like with her this must be what it's like for you. you care then you don't. tides. comes and goes. emphasis on goes. went. settled.

she likes the idea of walls too much. safe stasis. roots. you wanna leave.

and not just her. and not just the house. leave so hard the soles of your boots blossom like lillies. your feet open up like lillies. feet droop. lilies. and plucked so hard they have no memory of what earth feels like. the door growls and grinds its teeth. that's your favourite sound. bach. for a house so haunted yours is awfully close to the tube. somethingpark. somethingplatz. she doesn't kiss you goodbye. she knows. she wishes she could care less. somethingallee. red. push. red. push. red. run. zurückbleiben bitte. she once said she envies the movement of seaweed. obedient and grounded and certain and not. shoulder bounces back. *bitte?! shit. scheiße.*

*the woman's* cheeks blushhhhhh all the way up to *her* eyes. it's just a nudge but *the woman* hates your guts. will have them for garters.

it's spaghetti western stand-off. it's headlights vs. deer. you just wanna leave.

raises *her* hand knuckles starched dry. nails cold and gradient. glazed frost. won't bite. bleaching in places like pansies or tie-dye. there is a method to it. raises it slowly. *she* likes a statement. places *her* hand on your shoulder. holds it there for a quick second it's a century. squeezes *her* eyes. red up to *her* hairline now. blends in purple. *she* likes a statement. smirks. fingernails stab. wooden stakes. shoulder bounces back. all so out of the blue. sweet rush. adrenaline. blood.

something about it makes you wanna give her a call.

### *chapter four: (OVER S??N)*

maybe it's her fear of change. maybe it's her hair. always smelling of roasted coconut shavings after showers and her cackle rising in the key of schokokuss crackling. reveals strawberry ooze. throw it in the cart. and dying down like dried lavender in your palm late at night. you would find crumbs where the sheets crease for days. the predictability of inside her lips. chocolate chuckling pink. the night you met her you couldn't stop thinking about how that worn-out bon iver t-shirt on your bed would fit her. you would never go for something like that. would she. it was cinderella but trashier.

a tall stack of pringles comes tumbling down behind you. apocalypse. guy buttstrokes zombie pharmacist. won't waste a bullet. the kid has asthma. a can stops at your feet. paprika. *entschuldigung!* *she* shouts. you don't think this was a mistake. *the woman* said *she* would follow you around until you decide to apologise. tough luck. you don't mind the attention. this is reality tv. don't lose your cool. don't let *her* see you are enjoying this.

maybe it's her chopping onions too big. you're out. remember to grab a bag. her undercooking. you wouldn't miss that you don't think. you wouldn't miss her waking up at three am. clockwork. to worry about paperwork. you wouldn't miss almond milk. you would miss her. you would wanna give her a call every time a lady with a different kind of crazy hits you back in the shoulder and begins lurking in your shadow at the drugstore for thrills. or making the world a better place one punk at a time. *she* picks up a tub of ben and jerry's making faces at the ingredients. *she* can't believe ice cream has fat. traces coconut oil and almond paste and cocoa and sugar with nails as pale and bloodless as daisy petals.

you love her. you love her not.

### *chapter five: bloodborne*

she once said you are not much different from a natural disaster. your temper is not calculated. your pride oblivious and hot. would go up in flames.

### *chapter six: soy*

you taste the salt between her teeth. it dissolves on the tip of your tongue into something less crunchy and more nothing. she is there with you

most of the time. slurping noodles. sitting by the lake. sometimes she spaces out and you wish you could pick at her brain with your chopsticks. twist and twirl and twiddle and tweak. get the doubt out. it asks for delicacy and care and concern. get it out without pushing the branches into the lake with the pink of your elbow. smudging the wobbly reflection of the clouds cotton candy sweat dripping. operation. you are precise but rarely committed. note how the electric towers cut the sky criss cross crochet. do not trip on it. or else she'll know. the whole thing. is a pulse. is a monster is a cat. do not disturb. the doubt is hair. wrapped around everything carved on her eyeballs. everything that pulses and convulses and swells and settles and meets and eats each other. on her eyeballs. she has woven it with absolute artistry like a sick spider. so fine and so soft and so stubborn.

unravel.

diamond heist. find the balance between being an acrobat and a fly and a thief. pull it out. the doubt. butter. bend your neck. crack your neck if it calls for it. break your neck.

this is work finer than hair. surgeon hands.



her back is freckled like fruit cake. raisins concentrated on her shoulders. work of a baker  
just as careless as the sun just as careless as god. uneven and unimaginable in any other  
pattern. effortless. they are the colour of blood clots bite marks and cinnamon. spine swirling  
golden milk and belly ache. no one taught you how to untie insides when they squeak like  
balloon animals  
or the bed  
and sink as she sits up. slouched. her eyes mellow like raisins. something's cooking up. says  
you know i would. words stumble out like plastic vampire teeth sloppy and a mess and like  
the party's over.

her back has the scent of burnt sugar. never quite caramel.