

light reading series

featherproof 



amelia gray

AM/PM

AM:1

Terrence cannot think of a job position with more weight in the title than lifeguard. "Firefighter" simply describes. "Pastor" makes little sense, outside of a treatment for meat in Mexico. Usually pork. However, "lifeguard" carries with it a great deal of gravity which many might consider unearned by the lanky youths typically found atop most lifeguard stands. Terrence offers himself as a humble exception to the rule: out of shape and in full awareness of the importance of his position.

Three bathers prepare to enter the water. Terrence watches very closely from his stand, his red rescue buoy strapped across his lap. They are three women in thick one-piece suits. The pocked texture on their upper thighs is visible from fifty feet. They hold hands like girls and jump, shrieking, and Terrence holds his breath with them until all three surface, blissfully unaware of the risks they take when they place their blind faith in that water.

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Amelia Gray is a writer living in Austin, TX. Her writing has appeared in *The Onion*, *American Short Fiction*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Caketrain*, among others. Her work has been chosen as the finalist for *McSweeney's* Amanda Davis Highwire Contest and the *DIAGRAM* Innovative Fiction Contest. She received an MFA from Texas State University in San Marcos. These stories come from *AM/PM*, Amelia's first book, out now.

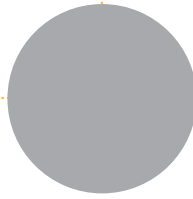


It was a warm Friday afternoon, and the rain hadn't yet begun. Sam was throwing a rubber-band ball at Hazel's forehead with repeated accuracy. "I wish you wouldn't do that," Hazel said. She closed her eyes when the rubber-band ball struck her forehead. "Do you have a better idea?" "You could *not* do that." "Sorry," he said, catching the ball and throwing it again in rhythm. "I won't define myself by what I am *not*, and what I *will not* do." She sighed. "You could throw it at the wall next to my forehead." She kept her forehead still for him when she pointed. "No go, unfortunately," he said, scooping up the ball. "I place too high a value on human interaction." "You could throw it at somebody else for a few hours." Sam looked wounded. He winged it hard enough to leave a red welt between her eyes. "I'd never do that to you," he said. "I love you." "Thank you," she said. "At least we have that," he said, aiming for the welt.

26:PM

AM:7

Good morning, John Mayer Concert Tee! I'm happy to see you survived the night. I know that I said my vespers before I pulled the covers up over my lips and nose to minimize the mosquito exposure. I looked to my dresser in the dark and added a silent refrain that you, John Mayer Concert Tee, would emerge, unscathed, from that land of broken windows. That your soft-pilled black poly blend, proudly emblazoned with the two-tone visage of Mr. Mayer himself, would not be spirited away. It is morning, John Mayer Concert Tee. I have a series of problems that cannot be solved.



And the angels looked upon the land, and they said, LORD, look upon this woman who waxes her stairs at seven in the morning. And the LORD looked upon the earth with grave mercy and spoke, saying: That woman must perish, for she is well and truly mad. And the woman upon the earth slipped on her waxen stair and cracked two ribs and suffered a skull fracture on the way down and she looked to the heavens and with her dying breath said, Why, LORD? And the angels did open beers and laugh, and the LORD did take pleasure in the morning.

AM:91

PM:96

Tess kept a secret: her left hand was turning into a claw. She felt the tendons tightening up in her forearm the week before, and had written it off as the onset of carpal tunnel, but the tendons continued to tighten. The feeling spread into her hand, which began to curve like a scythe, the bones lengthening a little and then bending, almost imperceptibly, until her fingers hardened into one immobile point and her left hand was fully a claw.

Tess kept the secret, but compensated by repeating it to herself. She would lie in bed, curled around her left hand, holding it gently to her knees. *My hand is a claw. My hand is a claw.*