

## ***OURS TO HOLD AND CARESS AND CHERISH***

**Hanif Abdurraqib**

A heavy grey cloud unlocks its doors & the moonlight stomps off behind it, a petulant child leaving behind smudges of darkness in its wake & that leaves us with nothing to speak about except the brutalities of feeling. I don't think I want to make it to the end of the world this time. This one ain't my type of apocalypse. I want a meteor, a sky black with sudden arrows. I want to know exactly how much time is left, to see the numbers on the clock descending. I might be in love, after all. I might slide a love letter across a table & take one last delight in watching a lover read whatever I've scrawled across paper while some fire consumes us or a rising ocean holds us patiently in a waiting palm before it makes a fist. To believe in the reality of a single soulmate is to believe that every lonely life exists because someone didn't travel towards someone else. A child dies somewhere and then, decades later, someone lives a series of unsatisfied days. Watches the game shows alone & goes to bed early, each day its own small apocalyptic orchestra of near-silence. The woman who lived in my house years before me is dead, but not gone. The arrogance of the living suggests that the dead rattle windows, that they nudge an old glass off the edge of a counter because they want us to be afraid. As if the dead have any use for our fear. The woman who died in the house that is now our house was alone in the attic for a month before she was found. Her mother found her, surrounded by mirrors. There are mirrors everywhere in the house that is now ours. On the landing between floors. In the hallways. In some of them, I am divided into several, smaller selves, each of them wrecked by their own individual longing. From the attic, I hear moans while the sun is out, lashing the highest windows with its heat. But at night, it is always laughter that echoes down through the vents, trembles the walls, runs its hands along my back until I fall asleep & it is like being held, in this way, by a lover from a world that has already ended. A different lover for every reflection in the room. And yet, when I wake, someone I loved once is still alive, somewhere else.