**The Thread**

Heather Rolland

 “Mango or raspberry?” she asked.

 “Raspberry,” he replied. He stroked the leg she had draped across this lap. A fine leg, he appraised, tracing muscles with his fingers.

 “Night or day?”

 “Night.”

 “Winter or summer?”

 He hesitated and made a bit of a face, displeased with the absence of autumn from the menu. “But that’s the point of the game,” she said, propping herself up on one elbow to look at him. Pillows askew, the folds of her t shirt, the only garment she was wearing, echoing the crests and troughs of the bedclothes that lay between them. “Winter or summer?”

 “Winter.”

 “Bus or train?”

 “Train.”

 “Snakes or spiders?”

 “Spiders.”

 “Six or seven?”

 “Six,” laughing.

 “Hopes or dreams?”

 “Dreams.” Then, for clarification, “The sleeping kind.”

 “Squid or octopus?”

 “Context?” he requested.

 “Culinary, aesthetic, potential for friendship… I don’t care.” She smiled broadly at him. “You choose.”

 “Squid.”

 She continued, playful, relentless.

 “Eagle or owl?”

 “Owl.”

 “Yoga or Pilates?”

 They both giggled. “Yoga. Naked. With you.”

 “Coffee or tea?”

 “Tea.”

 “Oak or maple?”

 “Maple.”

 “Canoe or kayak?”

 “Kayak.”

 “Red or green?”

 “Green.”

 “Chocolate or vanilla?”

 “Chocolate… no, wait. Plot twist: vanilla.”

 She smiled at him again. He met her gaze.

 “Flexibility or rigidity?” Her eyes flicked to his lap.

 “Rigidity.”

 They continued. Beach or mountain, flying or swimming, old or young, violin or cello. Silver. Sunrise. Kangaroo. Casablanca.

 “Stay or leave?” The words exited her mouth of their own accord before she fully grasped their impact. She had invoked the future and the choice that time would place squarely in their lap. Stay or leave.

 He saw her face change and sank back into the linens, releasing her leg, and stretching out. He extended his arm, inviting. She swam through the covers to position herself alongside him. He kissed her eyes. Wet and salty. He kissed her mouth. Salty and wet. Then she buried her face in the forest of his chest, weeping.

 He rested his chin on the top of her head, his arm instinctively wrapped around her, protective. Her body convulsed with emotion. Stay or leave. He tasted his own tears.

 “I can’t find the thread,” she told his breastbone. “It’s all just moments.” She lifted her face, searching for his eyes, her cadence fitful. “The moments are good, sometimes too good. So much beauty, so much joy…” she trailed off, burying her face again, muffling her voice as she pulled herself into him. “But it’s all just episodes, and they all end. I don’t know how to hold onto them. It’s like a necklace that broke and there’s all these beads spilling and bouncing and rolling around on the floor and I’m trying to pick them up and restring them and I have no string and no sense of their order.” She stopped, arched her neck to look at his face. “Am I making any sense? Each one is beautiful and valuable, precious even, but I can’t make them into a Thing. I just pick them up and hold them and weep at their beauty and feel paralyzed.”

 She snaked her arms around his neck, writhed her hips in even closer. He understood and rolled her onto her back. He filled her, his movements patient and probing, until she was no longer crying but crying out.

 Afterwards, she was calm, thoughtful even. “I just can’t find the thread,” she spread her hands wide.

 “You are the thread,” he told her.