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## In the Black and White

### Tamara Amanda Bryant

We've been sitting at the kitchen table for hours. I have been staring at the clock above your head wondering how the silence between us would finally break when I look back at you. You are busy writing notes in the salt you'd poured out on the table. Among your frenzied scroll I am able to make out the words, "Sometimes I hate you." Without saying a word, I yank the pepper shaker from the middle of the table, open it, and pour it out on top of your salt-art.

Using my fingers to mix the tiny grains and spread them out, I smile as you watch me. Your face portrays calm curiosity. We always play these games, don't we? We both have perfected our poker faces. My index finger slides through the mixture spelling out, "Sometimes I love you, too."

Your lips turn up into a sinister smile and you break the silence with, "The absence of hate is not love, darling." I grip the empty pepper shaker in my fist, wondering how the cool glass would look shattered on the wall behind you, just below the ticking clock. I've given myself plenty of time to calm down. The pepper shaker in my hand has become comfortably warm, like a smoother extension of me. I release it. In one fluid movement, it smashes against the wall having sailed just inches past your left ear. My eyes never leave yours and you never flinch.

You are in the middle of creating a new message in the mess on the table. When you're done it reads, "Sometimes I do love you, though."

I sit back in my chair, crossing my arms and closing my eyes, both hating and loving the way you always win. You stifle a yawn. The first movement I've seen since you completed your note. I reach for your hand scattering the grains on the table. I let the tears fall where they will. My voice cracks, "Truth is, even when I hate you I still love you."

You smile at my emotional display broadly and finally say, "I know." I'm back in your arms, running my fingers across your bare back, feeling the grains of salt and pepper fall away. The room echoes the sounds of my defenses shattering like smooth glass against the kitchen walls.