

## Paper Cuts

by *Timalyne Frazier*

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*This is a story about a woman with a remarkable talent.*

Don't be late for dinner.

Stand just inside your front door, at exactly 6:30 Eastern Standard Time, Tuesday, the 29th. I've invited all of our friends. I'm inviting you.

Jack is going to bring some early cherries and his new sweetie. She's new to me, anyway. Have you met her? He says her hair is soft falling curls of dark chocolate. I wonder, does she have a strong handshake and when she stands in front of me, will we see eye to eye? Will I feel compelled to bring up the past?

I asked Sage and Callie, to bring lilacs. They make me think of my great-grandmother. This last year the deer ate every last blossom here, and all of the new growth; my plant may never recover. I wonder if the lilacs are out of season over there? I'm sure Sage will find some other lovely bouquet, instead, if there aren't any lilacs. I still really like the deep purple ones; besides being my favorite color, as you know, the purple masks the brown as they go past, and the blossoms appear to be lovely so much longer than the white. I'll have a vase ready, full of water so we don't spend your time here on preparations. Sunny has made me a new vase, just this week. I dropped the last one and stood there looking at the pieces all in blue around my feet until Sunny reminded me that he can make me one for every day of the week. I was trying to figure out how to put the pieces back together, erase the damage.

Ember is bringing the mermaid game. Do you remember how to play it? It will help ease the homesickness I've been feeling lately, living so far from the ocean. My littlest one says the clay they dig up at the building site smells like seawater, but it just smells like the sewer pipe is busted, to me. She must be thinking of low-tide. I'm anxious to meet Ember's family. They won't all fit across one time fold. I had to find another place to fold a point nearby. I couldn't make the points wider or I'd risk disrupting the neighbors. It's a tricky fold, though, putting two points so close together. I can't rightly refuse to bring the whole family, even if I'd rather just see him. I can be so selfish sometimes.

Mae agreed to be the DJ. I need to focus, so that's one less thing for me to worry about. And I'm prone to worrying. Plus, there always has to be music after I'm through folding. Why does everyone live so far away? Maybe I'm the one to blame. No, I don't think I drove you away, I just couldn't be content in your neighborhood. In fact, I'm not content in my neighborhood. If this goes well, maybe you can visit me next year in Ireland, New Zealand or Massachusetts. Sunny will have to start all over again setting me up with dishes. You won't mind meeting him,

will you? It's been long enough, but I've noticed that the nose never forgets. Please don't wear any cologne, I doubt you've heard, yet, but it turns out I have asthma. Fingers on fire and lungs filled with water.

I looked in Pearl's living room window last night. Her cat looked lovely curled on the couch. It was a practice run and the first time I folded everything just right, but, there was a storm brewing and I couldn't stay long enough to talk to her. She smiled and comforted the cat as the thunder rolled. I wonder how long it will take for her to decide the mug I left in the hedge is meant for her.

I wish this were easier, less risky; we could all meet once a week. But each trip, it takes meticulous planning and practice, and when my fingertips are raw I'm clumsy. I took too long unfolding the first couple of times I tried; my fingers tripped. I'm sure you read about those hikers who started out in the Cascades and ended up north of Anchorage with no memory of the 2,500 miles in between. They were lost in the Alaskan wilderness for weeks—good thing I tried that one during the summer. I was pretty embarrassed and kind of worried. They didn't have money to get back, but everyone was so impressed by their amnesiac feat that it was a community effort at both ends and they were able to afford the plane tickets three days after they made town.

I'd like to invite Alexandra, even though you don't know her. I have been dreaming of Pad Thai from Noodles on Broadway. I'll tell her not too spicy and no cilantro, please. I've asked the others and they say they don't mind. No pressure, no worries. I want to do this all just right. I want it to be worth the risks. My hands bleed a little, the paper moves so fast under my fingers. You do want to be here, don't you? Has it been long enough? Will you come alone?

I need you all close by, but everything has to be just right. No bathroom breaks for you; no sticky fingers for me. I have a sturdy map, now. It won't rip or wrinkle when I fold. It took me a while to see how it would all work, how I could bring us all together without disturbing the peace. But I'm ready now. I've been training for a month and can fold and unfold like lightning. I know every crease by heart. My fingers are strong and well, healed from all the trial runs, smooth, supple.

Let's synchronize our watches: 1, 2, 3 now. What does your watch say? Mine says 3:33:33, 34, 35, 36. Are you on board? Does your watch count the seconds?

So, this is how it will go: I'll fold and as the clock blips forward, just once, you step in to my living room. Don't hesitate. I'm afraid if you are caught as I'm unfolding, you'll land in South Dakota or something. I took a train through there—nothing but miles of flat brown and white. I didn't see a single house. And maybe it was the time of year, but I think there's only one UPS truck to service the whole State. You may never be found and I won't know exactly where I dropped you. I miss you.

I need you here. I want to see you on my couch and curl there with you. Sunny won't mind. My cats will come and sniff your face so they can remember you, too. I need you in this house. Even though I'll leave here soon for a new neighborhood, I want you to be here for a bit to complete this chapter of my life. It has been so long that you and all of our friends have been spread out across my mind. You are scribbled scraps of paper here, the corner of a screen fonted over there, a crooked picture in my photo album, a ghosted memory, a suggestion. You have to visit here