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## Matchstick keeper

Jona L. Pedersen

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## Matchstick keeper

loves me, loves me not,  
loves me, loves me not, loves  
me, loves me – van Gogh painted her  
petals in the color of a highway  
sunset. the world is ending a little  
at a time, beginning in this empty  
parking lot; California was meant  
to burn. on fire, not on fire, on  
fire – he cut off his ear, again  
and again. then he soaked the sunflower  
seeds in his spilled blood. the rivers run  
hollow, but he will bleed to water the fields  
yellow. he will die on this canvas, his fate  
sealed by paint drier than a cactus forest.  
acrylics stuck beneath his fingernails,  
he scratches the surface of national  
geographic photographs. he carried  
a thousand ghosts in his palette, somebody,  
give him a band-aid for fuck's sake. who  
would have thought that his brush could turn  
red into blue and blue into the brightest color?  
like light filtering through the blinds of my  
window, seeping honey in the morning when  
the rooster tattooed on her skin calls on the  
scarecrow to protect van Gogh's field of  
sunflowers. she told me it means home and  
home is with her always, but I made my home  
in the parking lot where the matchstick keeper  
dwells. he's driving across burnt bridges while  
trumpets play on the radio, interrupted by static  
spells and chants. one hand on the steering wheel  
of his truck, a piece of bambi's antlers hanging  
from the keychain. bambi's roadkill, bambi's hooves  
forever treading the flames, bambi's taxidermied  
head mounted above the fireplace where smoke  
signals erupt from the chimney. they say,  
don't get too close, your canvas is only coal  
here. your canvas turned to ash, your wings will

catch fire; California burns  
yellow.

## About Jona L. Pedersen

Jona L. Pedersen grew up on an island on Norway's coast, but has since relocated to the US to pursue a degree in English with a minor in biology at the University of North Dakota. When they aren't studying, they like to explore the outdoors, spend time with their two rats, and make art. In their writing, Jona aspires to capture the wonders of the natural world – creating stories which tread the line between reality and dreams