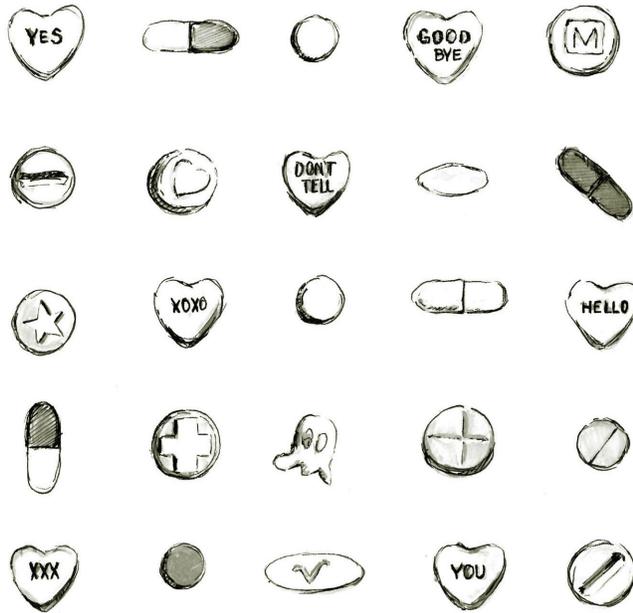


# EMERGENCY BRAKE

BY RUTH MADIEVSKY

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## EMERGENCY BRAKE



Ruth Madievsky

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Originally from Moldova, Ruth Madievsky is a poet, fiction writer, and essayist living in Boston. Her work has appeared in *Tin House*, *The American Poetry Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Poem-A-Day*, and elsewhere. She was the winner of *The American Poetry Review's* Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize, *The Iowa Review's* Tim McGinnis Award for fiction, and a *Tin House* scholarship in poetry. She is a founding member of the Cheburashka Collective, a community of women and nonbinary writers whose identity has been shaped by immigration from the Soviet Union to the United States. When she is not writing, she works as an HIV and oncology pharmacist.

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"Emergency Brake announces a vital voice and vision, the first gasp of something special. Bracing yet raucous, vicious yet whimsical, the collection is an ode to the precariousness of being and the potential in becoming."  
—*Prairie Schooner*



## PRAISE FOR *EMERGENCY BRAKE*:

“Ruth Madievsky’s first collection is an announcement like a bomb going off, like a super wave coming to swallow us up! For my part I am thrilled to be taken away by such energetic, funny, and heartbreaking work. This is a new voice made of sunlight, knives, emergencies, heat, honesty, bottles of vodka, and a tanker full of talent. Madievsky has created something we should not go without.”

—*Matthew Dickman*

“Go ahead, try all you want pulling on Ruth Madievsky’s emergency brake—but just remember it won’t do you any good. This will be the most exciting and inventive first book you have read in years, and this poet’s take-no-prisoners attitude makes for an ecstatic joyride. These deeply moving poems reflect the raw darkness paring at the edges of our lives, and they reveal how that dark can sometimes move to the very centers of our being. Sexy, irreverent, sorrowful, thrilling—the poems of *Emergency Brake* become a young woman’s survival manual for the twenty-first century: ignore it at your own peril.”

—*David St. John*

“...it’s the best new collection I’ve read in a long time. These poems will break your heart, make you laugh, turn you on, stain your teeth, open all the windows inside you...”

—*Staff Pick, Green Apple Books on the Park bookstore*

“...a metaphor-maker par excellence”

—*ZYZZYVA*

“The social importance of *Emergency Brake* doesn’t come at the cost of artful finesse; a cleverly engineered speaker who invites distrust through sly direction guides us through the collection’s gallery of sex and Los Angeles sprawl...”

—*Columbia Journal*

“Madievsky is a careful and purposeful poet, whose use of humor only adds to the strength of this collection...Every poem in this collection, dear reader, is worth your time, every question raised herein worth your consideration, because you live in the world of this speaker, a world that is being reconstructed by a distinct and powerful voice.”

—*Waxwing*

“...she orchestrates dramatic and sometimes violently sensual relations between the real and the so-called surreal—as if these two modes are acquaintances intent on intoxicating one another.”

—*Boston Review*

“Two amazing things are happening in *Emergency Brake*, and they happen to be just what I need in a poetry collection: metaphors that leap and dazzle, guided from cover to cover by spoonfuls of narrative...*Emergency Brake* is filled with boxcar after boxcar of metaphors you’ll wish you wrote, but Madievsky got to them first. You’ll want to hate her if it wasn’t for that sugary child jumping up and down behind your ribs, yelling, “Do it again! Do it again!”

—*Harpur Palate*

## REVIEWS, INTERVIEWS, & LINKS:

*The Cheburashka Collective: New poetry of the post-Soviet diaspora*, by Hilah Kohen (Meduza)  
<https://meduza.io/en/feature/2019/04/29/the-cheburashka-collective-new-poetry-of-the-post-soviet-diaspora>

*Episode V: Diana Arterian + Ruth Madievsky* (Ruth Stone Foundation Podcast)  
<https://podcast.ruthstonefoundation.org/podcast/episode-v-diana-arterian-ruth-madievsky/>

*Forms of Self-Interrogation*, by Maggie Millner (ZYZZYVA)  
<https://www.zyzyva.org/2016/05/02/forms-of-self-interrogation-qa-with-emergency-brake-author-ruth-madievsky/>

*10 Questions for Ruth Madievsky*, by Katherine Keenan (The Massachusetts Review)  
<https://www.massreview.org/node/791>

*Ruth Madievsky on Medicine & The Arts* (Push Pull Books)  
<http://www.pushpullbooks.com/good-books/2016/3/15/ruth-madievsky-on-medicine-the-arts.html>

*A Review of Emergency Brake*, by Dexter L. Booth (Waxwing Literary Journal)  
[http://waxwingmag.org/items/Issue9/56\\_Booth-Emergency-Brake.php#top](http://waxwingmag.org/items/Issue9/56_Booth-Emergency-Brake.php#top)

*Indies Recommend: 10 Small Press Books You Should Read*, by Green Apple booksellers (Literary Hub)  
<https://lithub.com/indies-recommend-10-small-press-books-you-should-read/>

*Ruth Madievsky: Chemist, Poet*, by Dwarf & Giant (The Last Bookstore)  
<http://dwarfandgiant.com/ruth-madievsky/>

*Repurposing Violence*, by Nathan Xavier Osorio (Columbia Journal)  
<http://columbiajournal.org/review-repurposing-violence/>

*Fall Poetry Reading*, by Jesse Nathan (Boston Review)  
<http://bostonreview.net/poetry/november-december-microreviews>

## TALKING POINTS FOR *EMERGENCY BRAKE*:

The body  
Sex  
Medicine  
Trauma  
Sexual violence  
Immigration  
Soviet diaspora  
Anxiety  
Self-interrogation  
Associative language  
Pharmacy  
Dark humor



**“We think of ourselves as discrete units. We think we know where our bodies begin and end. Really, we’re more like sieves. Some breaches are pleasurable, others odious, and some are so slow and microscopic we don’t notice them until their cumulative effect necessitates a reckoning.”**  
—Ruth Madievsky, from an interview with ZYZZYVA

## EXCERPTS FROM EMERGENCY BRAKE:

### SHADOWBOXING

To let grief ride my blood.  
To say *eye* but mean *staircase*.  
To wonder how many times  
the suitcase inside me can open and shut.  
What it would take to shatter  
a wine glass in my hand.  
To want desperately to be queen of something.  
Queen of crying in coatrooms, queen of waiting  
for the medicine to take.  
To let the rabid dog of anxiety off its leash.  
To wear the brass knuckles of loneliness.  
What was it between us that went out?  
Why do I feel like an x-ray patient all the time?  
To address someone I love  
the way a knife is thrown at a tree.  
To let my brain swallow the mouthwash.  
To ask the usual questions, whose fingernail, whose condom.  
If I throw enough lamps, will you come.

### CACTUS

I'm sitting beside a cactus in a stranger's backyard,  
trying to remember the last time  
I celebrated something that wasn't a holiday.  
I'd like to call last night a celebration,  
how the sheets drew around us like a prom dress,  
how my fingers were out partying all night  
in the disco of your mouth. Anyone who says  
they don't want to be celebrated  
is lying. We all want champagne corks  
praising each slip knot  
of the tongue, each the launch code  
for another bottle rocket to fire,  
streaking across the sky  
the way a peeled dress slices the dark.  
I'm stroking the cactus between its quills,  
wondering when was the last time  
the man whose house I am renting was celebrated,  
when someone last took him  
in her mouth. Years from now,  
when we've walked out of all our photos,  
we will remember the doves we coaxed  
from each other's throats,  
blood and sunlight, the neck an altar,  
how we took each other like barbiturates.

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### TINY SHOTGUN

There is a tiny shotgun  
behind both eyes.  
If not my eyes, my lungs.  
If not my lungs, an ambulance must be going by,  
its siren a hole I climb into,  
wondering about the person inside  
and whether he is coming or going,  
whether she will be making any more egg white omelets.  
I've been thinking about disinfectants in urinals  
and how they're called cakes,  
which is similar to the time I told Alice  
her boyfriend was a gentleman  
for driving me home  
and left out the part  
where he put his hand on my ass  
and also the part where I didn't tell him to stop.  
There is something about cheap wine and leather jackets  
I want nothing to do with.  
Let's play a game:  
you get to be anything you want  
and I get to be something that's not antifreeze.  
Let me be a slow dance  
or a dime in a fountain, something  
that won't leave you in a stairwell  
like a spit-laced cigarette,  
something more than the air in a fist.  
I don't know why my hands  
keep turning into asthma inhalers,  
why lately everything has been storm clouds  
and operating tables. I have locked myself  
in the pantry with three matches  
and a bag of ice. I guess this is winter,  
the breakfast, lunch, and dinner of it,  
I guess I feel like an earring  
in a hotel parking lot,  
a blacked-out window  
in a community theatre  
where, inside, one woman is telling another  
the difference between pain  
and the idea of pain, and the man selling tickets  
is sucking on a jawbreaker  
and trying not to think  
about crash sites and government cheese.



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