EMERGENCY BRAKE
BY RUTH MADIEVSKY
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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.

“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)

EpsiOd e V: DianA Arterian + Ruth Madievsky (Ruth Stone Foundation Podcast)

_Foms of Self-Interrogation_, by Maggie Millner (ZYZZYVA)

10 Qua ns for Ruth Madievsky, by Katherine Keenan (The Massachusetts Review)
https://www.massreview.org/node/791

Ruth Madievsky on Medicine & The Arts (Push Pull Books)

_A Review of Emergency Brake_, by Dexter L. Booth (Waxwing Literary Journal)

Indies Recommend: 10 Small Press Books You Should Read, by Green Apple booksellers (Literary Hub)

_Ruth Madievsky: Chemist, Poet_, by Dwarf & Giant (The Last Bookstore)
http://dwarfandgiant.com/ruth-madievsky/

Re purposi ng 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,
_fnh_ering 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.

**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.