the echo.
the echo.

Furman University’s Literary and Visual Arts Magazine
Dear reader,

It has been a privilege to create the magazine you now hold in your hands. We, the Editorial Board, asked you for your ravings, your yearnings, your rage, your confessional, your obsessive, your brutally, beautifully honest. And you rose to our challenge, exceeding our expectations as you do every year. I am truly grateful for your courage to create and to share your art. This magazine would not exist without you, reader, because *The Echo* is above all the creation of our student body, by our student body, and for our student body. My hope is that you will find some aspect of yourselves, and the world we share, within these pages. Learn from those pages that are written through unfamiliar eyes. Grow from those pages that present a reality you never thought to dig for.

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I would also like to thank my Editorial Board and my Assistant Editors for their cooperation and enthusiasm, and above all for sharing in my dream of creating something inimitable, audacious, exquisite: 2019’s *The Echo*.

Faith Kressner
Editor-in-Chief
Class of 2019
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The loneliest people are those who only know their language. Each person is a system of signs, a web of grammar, body language, thoughts, and eyes. Every cell in us is screaming to communicate—to connect. I actually believe we are even more complex than tongues. We are a beautiful arrangement of fears and passions. Who dares to learn you? To speak you? Who deems you worthy of knowing and understanding?
Wall

Poetry • Eli Simmons

*After Emma Lazarus’ “The New Colossus”*

Keep, all ye nations of the world,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shores,
Your huddled masses, your homeless,
Your hungry, your tired, your poor.

Look not in hope to that mighty woman;
Her torch burns not for you.
It burns for us and us alone:
The God-fearing privileged few.

Knock not upon that golden door;
No answer you shall receive.
No aid awaits you within these walls;
The Mother of Exiles sleeps.

So return, all ye tempest-tost strangers,
To the lands from whence you came.
America belongs alone to us;
Long closed are Liberty’s gates.
Love Sucks
Emily Lane
Watercolor and ink
Snow
Fiction • Maddie De Pree

On the third night of the snowstorm, I took Flem’s hi-fi speaker and started playing “Midnight, The Stars, and You” from The Shining soundtrack. Then I cracked the door to our room just enough for some music to leak into the hallway, in hopes that someone in the dorm would go insane and hack me to pieces. I had been playing the song on repeat for thirty minutes straight.

I looked over at Flem, who was still icing his balls. We had gone outside earlier that day to have a snowball fight, which I had ruined by accidentally nailing him right in the nuts with an especially tightly-packed snowball. He hadn’t believed me when I said it was an accident, so he’d hobbled back inside and spent the rest of the day naked in his bed, surrounded in a nest of blankets, with one of those beady blue ice packs draped over his crotch. He was a melodramatic person.

It had been a bad week. We were supposed to be on winter break, but the storm was so bad that it had ruined everyone’s travel plans. No flights were going in or out, and the roads were too bad to even drive to the corner store. Everyone had been marooned on campus for days, and it was looking like we would be stuck there through Christmas. I thought this was hilarious, mostly because everyone was so upset, but also because I hadn’t wanted to go home anyway. I liked being on campus when there was nothing to do.

Flem and I had been random roommates during our
freshman year, and we had decided to live together again as sophomores. Aside from the incident with his balls, we got along. We watched the same shows, and we went to bed late, and we understood that nobody particularly liked or disliked us. If anyone ever interacted with one of us, it was usually because they had mistaken me for Flem, or vice-versa. We didn’t actually look alike. We were both just skinny and pale.

The song had started itself over again. I tried to catch Flem’s eye, but he had his headphones on and wouldn’t look at me. I couldn’t tell if he was actually injured or just pretending. I walked over to the speakers and turned up the volume. Flem glared at me, then went back to staring at his laptop.

A moment later, a girl appeared outside of our cracked door. I walked to the doorway and looked at her. She was short and white and had a perfectly circular face, so circular that I was almost disturbed. To be perfectly frank, she reminded me of something that really ought to live in the water. I had never seen a person look so much like a walking fish.

“Hey,” I said.

“Hi,” said fish-girl. She put her hands on her hips and tried to peer into our room. “Do you live in there?”

“Yes,” I said. I shifted to block Flem’s naked body from view.

“Right,” said the girl. She pointed in the direction of the music. “Can you turn that down? Some of the residents said they’re creeped out.”

“No kidding,” I said. I looked over my shoulder at Flem’s speaker, which had just reached the chorus. “I was going for an Overlook vibe.”

She blinked at me.

“I don’t know what Overlook is,” she said. “Can you turn it down?”

“Who are you, again?”

“I’m your RA,” she said.

“Oh,” I said. I had never seen her before. “Sorry. I don’t have my contacts in.”

“He’s a liar,” Flem called from his nest. “He doesn’t wear contacts.”

The RA poked her head around my side to see who was talking. Flem tried to whip one of his blankets over his exposed body, but he was too slow—the RA got a full-frontal view of him and leapt backwards, her hands clapped over her face. Both of them screamed.

“God!” yelled the RA. I was laughing. She uncovered her bulging eyes and glared at me. She looked like she was on the verge of tears. “You guys aren’t funny, you know. Some people actually want to go home.”

“Wow,” I said. Now Flem was laughing too.

“I’m leaving,” fish-girl said. “Just—turn down your stupid song.”
She looked me up and down, then shook her head. The music was still playing.

“Assholes,” she added. Then she left.

I cut the music and I asked Flem what we should play next, but he had remembered his damaged balls and was ignoring me again. I paced around the room a bit and wondered what fish-girl was doing. I decided that she was probably crying. I tried to make myself cry just for something to do, but nothing happened, so I gave up. I hoisted myself onto my bed and stared at Flem.

“Flem,” I said.
He fiddled with his headphones and pretended not to hear me.

“Flem,” I repeated. No reply.

“I think I’m gay,” I said.

I didn’t actually think this. I just wanted to annoy him. Flem looked up at me and narrowed his eyes. Outside, snow was falling.

“Congratulations,” he said.

“Thanks,” I said. Then I hopped off of my bed and started pulling on my snow boots.

This got his attention. He slid off his headphones and propped himself up against his blankets.

“Where are you going?” he asked. His ice pack was slipping off of his crotch. I winced.

“Cover yourself,” I said. “I’m going to a party.”

“With who?”

“With friends,” I said.

“You don’t have any friends,” said Flem.

I couldn’t think of anything to say to that, so I pulled on my coat, gloves, and hat and saluted him.

“Hope your balls get better soon,” I said. Then I left.

I walked downstairs to the dorm’s exit and pushed open the door with one hand. The frozen air flooded in and hit me like a wall. I braced myself against it, then walked outside and looked around. Everything was white and still. Had there been any noise, the snow would’ve absorbed it and turned it to nothing. But the dorms were dead, and the whole courtyard was silent. It was just after midnight. Everyone was inside, sleeping. I pulled my hat down over my ears and headed toward the upperclassmen apartments. I had never been to any parties on campus, so I wasn’t sure how they worked. I figured I would just walk around until I found something.

The snow was falling faster now. The walk across campus was longer than
I had remembered, and my hands were getting cold. I considered turning back, but the thought of hanging out with Flem and his ice pack for the rest of the night was too unappealing. I was about to give up when I heard some music pulsing behind the door of a ground-floor apartment. I tried the handle—unlocked—and walked in. The door swung shut behind me.

There were only about ten people total inside. A few were playing beer pong on the kitchen counter, and another two were crammed into an armchair. Five or so people were sitting on the couches, which had been pushed together into an L shape. Some of them were passing around a cereal bowl filled with different colored pills.

As I stood near the door, someone extracted himself from the armchair and lurched over to me. He had a scented trash bag draped over his shoulders.

“Welcome,” he slurred. “What’s your name?”
“Elvis,” I lied. “Are you the host?”
“Host’s over there,” he said, and pointed at nothing.
“Thanks,” I said.

There were some liquors sitting on the counter, so I mixed three of them together and drank it. It tasted like hell. I finished it, then poured myself another. The beer pong players had given up on their game and decided to occupy themselves with the music. They couldn’t seem to decide on a song—every ten seconds, one of them would grab the phone and switch to a new one, which was supremely annoying. I sipped my drink and looked around. No one else seemed bothered.

I was thinking of leaving when someone else walked up to me. He was swilling something out of an empty Head and Shoulders bottle.

“I see you found the drinks,” he said. He shot a look at my cup, which was giving off fumes. “You a freshman?”
“I don’t go here,” I said.
“Cool,” he said. He reeked of vodka and dip. Other than me, Head and Shoulders was the most sober person there. “I’ll give you the tour.”

He showed me the porch, then the living room, then the fridge, then the living room again. I poured myself another drink. At the end of his tour, he took a swig from his Head and Shoulders bottle and pointed at the bowl of pills, which was nestled between two people on the couch.

“It’s twenty bucks for a handful,” he said.
“Very reasonable,” I said, nodding. This could have been a ripoff, or it could’ve been a great deal. I wouldn’t have known.

“That’s pretty much it,” he said. “I think there’s some coke in the bathroom. You’ll probably have to, like, Venmo somebody, though. I don’t know. It’s not mine.”
I didn’t particularly want to do cocaine, so I thanked him and joined the people on the couches. Someone passed me the bowl of pills. I finished my drink, then looked at the people on either side of me. The one on the right was asleep. I turned to the girl on my left.

“Who do I pay?” I asked. I could feel the liquor hitting. She yawned.

“Doesn’t matter,” she said.

I shrugged, then dumped some pills into my mouth and swallowed them with someone else’s drink. Then I leaned into the cushions and watched people. They all looked half-awake. Some minutes went by. I scooped up another handful of pills and stuffed them into my pocket. Every thirty seconds, a stubby blonde girl wandered into the middle of the living room and demanded that someone take a shot off of her navel; her friends, for some reason, emphatically refused. After about five minutes of this, I stood up and told her I would do it. This excited everyone, and the Head and Shoulders guy helped her stretch out on the kitchen counter so I could take the shot. Then he handed me a bottle of vodka and stepped away.

As soon as the girl hiked up her shirt, I saw why no one else had volunteered: she had the most massive outie belly button that I had ever seen. It was nearly two inches in diameter, and stuck outward by nearly an inch. I looked up and saw that the whole room had gathered around us. Head and Shoulders shook his head at me, grim. I looked back down at the belly button. It was so protrusive that any alcohol would dribble right off the sides. It wasn’t physically possible for it to hold a shot.

Outie girl was giggling. She seemed blissfully unaware of the tension brewing around her. I stood there, thinking. After almost a minute, I poured some alcohol onto the outie and placed my mouth on it. Everyone threw their hands in the air and cheered.

I regretted it almost instantly. As soon my lips touched the girl’s belly button, I had a terrible feeling that it would come unknotted like the end of a balloon and release all of her insides into my mouth, and the possibility of this suddenly seemed so imminent and real that I backed away in horror and puked up everything all over the carpet. The cheering stopped.

I straightened, wiped my mouth, and looked around at everyone. For a moment, it was quiet. I glanced at the floor. I could see some of the pills floating in my puke like little islands. Then they all started cheering again, and the outie girl slid off the counter and kissed me on the cheek, and I thought that I might die, or that maybe I had died, and maybe this was hell.

Eventually the cheering died down, and everyone retreated to their spots on the couch or on the floor. I had gotten some puke on myself, so I walked into the bathroom to clean up. Some guy was standing in front of the sink.

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nudged him to the side and splashed some water onto my face, which sobered me up a bit. I patted my face dry on my t-shirt and watched the guy for a while. He was good-looking in a boring sort of way, with dark brown hair and a gray sweater. I hadn’t seen him in the main room. He had probably been in here the whole time. He kept stroking his own reflection and sighing in frustration, as if unable to tell if the surface of the mirror was liquid or solid.

After a moment, I tapped him on the shoulder.

“I think I’m gay,” I said. I don’t know why I kept telling people this. I think I just wanted something to say. He pulled away from the mirror and regarded me with blurry eyes.

“Gross,” he said.

Then we made out. It was unpleasant. He was a bad kisser, but I didn’t know how to tell him this, so I just carried on and hoped that he would get bored before anything serious happened. After about ten minutes, he started to paw at my belt, so I sprinted out of the bathroom, grabbed my coat, and fled from the apartment. For some reason, everyone was clapping.

The snow had finally stopped. I looked up and saw some stars peeking through the clouds. Then I remembered the pills in my pocket and swallowed down the rest of them with a handful of snow.

Flem was asleep when I got back, so I flicked on all the lights and threw myself onto my bed.

“Flem,” I howled.

Flem covered his head with a pillow and groaned. I laid down and watched the room spin. Everything looked pink. The walls were trying to bend around me.

“I am not doing so well,” I said.

“Turn off the lights,” Flem groaned. His voice was muffled beneath his pillow.

I obliged. I wanted to sleep, but I knew I wouldn’t be able to, so I laid in the dark and thought about emailing my professors to let them know that I had died. I could hear Flem being awake. My heart was moving around in my chest.

“Flem,” I said.

My face was wet. I heard him roll over.

“What,” he said.

“I had a dream once where you were the only person in the world,” I said. I was crying. “Everyone else was gone. Even me.”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Flem said. “You can’t have a dream without you in it.”
“But I did,” I sobbed. “I really did.”
Flem paused. I could feel him looking at me in the dark.
“Tell me about it tomorrow,” he said. “I don’t want to know about it now.”
Then he rolled back toward the wall. I pulled my sheet over my face and slept.
I Wonder What’s Out There
Ren Zimmerman
Scratchboard
It’s just about who you know. People hire their friends,” Bea says.

Bea is in her fifties. She is rapidly greying, frizzy hair combed down and pulled halfway back. She is the type who will speak to people in the checkout line at the grocery store even if they don’t wish to listen. Bea is telling a story as an interruption to a presentation about the job search and professionalism. Seated around a projector and screen, the other five people in the room give her their attention. The presenter, a young woman, clutches the clicker, itching to move to the next slide.

“For instance,” Bea goes on, “I was in a coffee shop the other day, sitting at a table drinking my coffee. I had applied to a position there as a barista. And I kid you not, as I was sitting there, one of the baristas was speaking to the manager behind the counter about me—that I didn’t have the experience needed for the job. But I do!” She slaps her hand on the table. “The next week I go in for my coffee and they’ve hired a young person. You know, one of their friends.”

“Also,” she adds, “that place has one of the biggest employee turnovers I’ve ever seen. Every month, new people.” Her hands rise in exasperation, and she looks around. The presenter nods as affirmation.

“Yeah, connections are really important,” she says. She clicks forward in the presentation. Everyone looks back to the screen. Bea sits in her chair, hands clutched in her lap.

It’s late at night, and Bea hunches over her desktop computer in the corner of a dimly lit living room near her fraying couch and scuffed coffee table. She
squints at the computer screen, huffing as the page continues to load.

“Come on, damn it.”

On the screen is an application, which took her an hour to fill out as she clicked through the many question boxes and typed out the answers in a clunky manner. The computer is outdated, and her internet is slow. Applications can take ages to submit, and sometimes, in particularly frustrating moments, the computer goes black, the diligent work she devoted vanishing. Even if she does manage to make it to the screen where she can successfully submit, she knows that the likelihood of a job coming from this impersonal method—one online application in a dumpster of others—is slim. But she feels like she’s trying, and so she persists.

The page is still loading.

She rubs her eyes and releases a long breath, squints at the time on the screen. It’s past midnight. She hasn’t eaten since lunch.

In the kitchen, she finds bread and peanut butter and honey way back in the cabinet and makes herself a sandwich. She takes it out to her front porch and sits there in the solitary plastic chair.

It’s warm, midsummer, and cicadas chatter at each other. Eating her sandwich, she hums and looks out at the quiet street.

* A car moves past on the street, churning with the cicadas. What would’ve it been like, she wonders, to have had a husband and children? To have married a man when she was in her twenties and maybe found a job while he worked in a factory or at an office or maybe had some babies. To have gone to the beach together in the summer. To have woken up in the early darkness of mornings and made breakfast together. To have read beside each other in bed at night.

If there were babies, it would’ve been livelier, more tiring. She would have cleaned up toys from the living room floor and tried to clean out food stains from onesies. She would have taken the older ones to ballet or musical theater or basketball. She would have pestered them about using shampoo and soap in the shower. They would have made her laugh with their funny sayings and made her cry with their sweet openness to love and be loved.

Bea finishes her sandwich. The street is empty again. The houses, hunched together, and normally vibrant with activity during the day—people lounging on porches and carrying groceries and kids to and from cars—are still and contained, only streetlights casting notice on them. Blinds closed, lights off. Bea is alone.

She sets down her plate on the porch, brushes bread crumbs from her lap. She sits for a couple more minutes and then goes back inside. At her computer again, she waits. The page is loading. *Any minute now*, she thinks. *It will be any minute now.*
The minutes unfold on her computer screen clock, and her eyes shudder as she waits for a screen with a button that reads “Submit” where she can send in the application.

The night deepens, cicadas grown bolder and houses stiller, and Bea falls asleep at the computer, eventually dragging herself away to her cramped bedroom and fumbling into her nightgown. She doesn’t remember falling asleep, but she wakes crying from a dream in which she couldn’t buy a ticket for a flight at the airport because nobody would look at her and listen—a dream where she stood in the terminal and watched out the window as the 747s kept lifting off and launching into the sky.
Slash
Olivia White
Photography
editor's choice

Humanoid
Kenny Nguyen
Photography
Compañera
Poetry • Sally Cannon

¿Te sientes alguna vez como un ladrillo de madera
En una pared de ladrillos regulares?

Virginia y yo nos tendemos juntas
De vez en cuando
Oímos la lluvia golpeando la ventana

Escuchamos música francesa en el altavoz de su móvil

Todo me inunda—no sólo la lluvia, no sólo la música,
Solo ella y yo en este momento

Solamente allí, no hay cemento que te contenga...

Do you ever feel like a wooden brick
In a wall of regular bricks?

Virginia and I lay together
Once in a while
We hear the rain beating on the window

We listen to French music over her phone’s speakers

Everything floods over me—it’s not just rain, not just music,
Just her and I in this moment

Just there, no cement can hold you...
1574
Adel Takacs
Acrylic on canvas
Autumn
Poetry • Ella Morton

When the golden hour stretches
into a golden afternoon,
we sit twisted together,
my legs on top of your legs on top of my legs.

Quiet is something
I am learning from you,
how to be with someone
without speaking.

I am not very good at it,
but you tell me
the silence feels comfortable.
safe here, with you
Poetry • Camiell Foulger

i lay in bed,
in the hotel your father paid for,
we have two beds, but
one remains untouched,
the other with the sheets rumpled and crumpled into a landscape
of delicate topography,
your mouth is still hanging open in the embrace of sleep and balance,
and you breathe in,
and I breathe out,
into the silence created
by the white noise of traffic on a Thursday morning
in asheville, n.c.

memorizing the angles of your face,
i continue to question the series of events I always expect but have yet to an-
swer to,
of a growl of fags dykes lezbos carpet munchers
eyes narrowed to pinpricks,
we know we will feel the stare of a thousand seas in the omnipresent eye of
the people,
grinding the world to a halt,
and eliminating what little cause for rebellion we have to bare,
like the crisp descent of love into a blooming of muted color,
we still stand together.

but still I find myself thinking there is safety in numbers,
there is reassurance in youth and girls and a heartbeat,
there is an unfounded cause for hope in the scent of the compassionate
and the shape of the quiet indifferent,
bringing us different fruits of uncertain labors,
those simply existing to be bolder than before,
we stare back to hold their eyes between the fingers of our smooth palms
and clench our teeth.

i breathe in the bite of frost,
waiting for something mean,
A tsk of resistance,
hold my hand—I tell you,
and our intertwined fingers are stiff with cold,
and our boots shuffle on the pop of loose bricks and uncertain cracks,
i could tremble for my loss of childhood,
it’s ebbing with the tide.

snow flurries carousing the shock of wind against the glass windows
we cherish, cherish,
cherish your bone, your breath, your beautiful brain,
cradling the innocence of young in love handfulls,
they are pressed to my chest,
as I turn to stare into the glass bubble beating back the bite,
and with each ache,
i count and wait for a baring of fangs.

try to be morally right,
try to be appealing,
you can get away with murder under the guise of a good look and an easy smile,
one that lingers in the corners of your mouth,
for men have not smiled like wolves,
or licked their lips, tasting the kill,
that kill that strides into the sun before them,
careful and bulldozing the moon and the stars,
we are gleaming with some intangible, heartrending call,
we are impossibly afraid but—
we remain untouchable.

craving creature comforts,
i fear the assault of the senses the others must feel,
the one born of:
two girls holding hands.

girls of septum rings and purple hair,
doc martens on every pair of feet,
hair dyed, torn jeans,
thick, empty guts,
bleeding into the streets,
of downtown bustle and brawn.

it is apparent.
i will always be an outsider,
masquerading as something more solid and always smiled upon.
in unison,  
we step away from the curb,  
eyes following the stunning hiss of tire and engine,  
air rushing past,  
billowing against ears cool to the touch,  
to say something along the lines of:  
here is my hope and my dream,  
my grit and my pounding pulse,  
to walk together unmarred by the wavering glare of others,  
calm and collected into the bravado of a day’s grace,  
quietly accepted without word or shudder.

traditional remains transfixed in the heart of the bible belt,  
my home country,  
my sensual, starlit wound lain open to sunlight and moon,  
the taste of salt between lips,  
and hair tangled around the wrists of two people  
still playing a game of enigma in the middle of the city,  
i can’t quite remember how to feel something other than a mystifying sense  
of terror  
bubbling and bubbling and teething along the underside of my chin,  
i can’t quite remember the sensation of comfort,  
of feeling perfectly natural in front of the public eye roving over skin and bone,  
over the flicker of the bluest of eyes against the palest of faces,  
over your body,  
over my thinly-veiled smile of discomfort,  
i try to stand corrected.  
what a scintillating dream we have engendered on half-truths and the ignorance  
of interpreting a glance incorrectly,  
strangers stifle us with a loss of warmth,  
friction between norm and the disrespected,  
i yearn for sunsets to a story.  
but then there is always this:  
you turn to me still,  
lips pursed and fingers curled on your hip,  
knowing what could happen but not caring,  
and you say:  
hold my hand,  
and of course,  
i do.
No Easy Way
Emily Hardwick
Photography
Ricky and the Endless Monotony
Fiction • Ben Gamble

“Hey man,” Ricky said. “Stuff like this is pretty beautiful, huh?”

There is no point to any of this, I thought back.

We were floating in Ricky’s above-ground pool, looking up at the stars. The pool had half a dozen holes in it, so he had a few garden hoses pumping water back in where he failed to duct tape the levees back together. He’d somehow engineered equilibrium and we stayed constant in the tepid water. We’d been floating long enough for his backyard to turn from soil to swamp to sludge. I fumbled at the cooler that drifted between us, grabbing another beer. The stars had all turned into shooting stars three cans back.

I met Ricky at a bar outside of Paris, Tennessee. I had wanted to die in Paris, drinking wine with a handsome man on the Seine.

They have a fake Eiffel tower in Paris, Tennessee. I figured I could get a six-pack and convince one of the locals to get naked with me underneath it. That was probably as close as I was going to get.

I was doing my best to squeeze a few more days into my lifespan before someone put a bullet in my head. I figured if I took enough shots, it would make getting shot a little easier. Hence the bar. Hence Paris, Tennessee. Hence Ricky.

The bar had no chairs. It wasn’t some kind of new trend. It was just a really shitty bar. There was no clear dividing line between the simple smell of dip and where the tobacco had chemically bonded to the oxygen.

“Hey man,” Ricky said, looking at me trying to wobble my center of gravity back over the counter. The no chairs thing was a lot harder to handle now than it had been a few hours ago. Ricky had narrow set brown eyes that looked perpetually confused.
“You new in town?”

I blinked a few times, trying to process Ricky and every stupid thing about those six words. I was not a man. I was wearing a dress I’d bought in the Moscow airport. I had a duffel bag with a Spetsnaz patch ripped off next to my feet.

Ricky had a mullet. There was no duffel bag next to his feet, but he was still carrying a lot of baggage. His brown hair had enough oil to be a member of the Saudi royal family. I moved to face him, my head a few seconds slower on the turn than my eyes. Or maybe my eyes were slower than my head. I nodded my head up and down.

“Had a feelin’,” Ricky said, turning back to his drink. It was October. He was wearing a Carhartt jacket with the elbows worn through and cargo shorts that jingled as he walked. His calves were rock solid, columns of hairy marble that connected bulging pockets to Walmart work boots. “You need a place to stay?” he asked. His eyes widened and his pudgy cheeks reddened a bit. “I don’t mean, like—you know, your being a woman and all, just—just hospitality, seems like—”

My neurons waded through the American piss the bartender had on tap to start firing. Ricky seemed harmless. I was probably going to be sleeping on the bathroom floor otherwise. And there was absolutely no way this man was high profile.

I nodded, and somehow it felt like I slurred that too.

•••

Ricky’s couch was pretty comfortable, all things considered. It was a polyester refuge in the middle of his home. There was a family quilt thrown over the couch that Ricky would explain to me the significance of many times. I got lost every time, mostly because at least three relatives in the quilt’s lineage were named Marlene.

“It ain’t much, but she’s comfy. Here,” he said, disappearing down a hallway. Well, down the hallway. Ricky’s house was a bungalow, one long hallway that had a few rooms jutting off here and there. The house looked like a snake, if God had been drunk when he made the snake. The walls were wood paneling and it all smelled like dust. I staggered and managed to fall onto the couch with some semblance of grace. Ricky came back with a white bedsheets and a camo pillow.

Back in Moscow, I could’ve pulled off two hundred sit-ups. Ricky had to help me get my head high enough for the pillow to slip under.

“I’ll leave your bag here,” Ricky said, putting my duffel next to the couch. It clinked. Not like, spare change in Ricky’s pockets clink. Like, assault rifle clink. Ricky didn’t notice. “Hey, man, you sleep good.”
I’m not a man. I tried to say with my face. I don’t sleep anymore, anyways.

That was the first night I passed out on Ricky’s couch.

Most mornings I woke up the same way. My brain was working through the tail end of a dream. Always the same sorts of places. A bombed out house in Chechnya, the smell of gunpowder and salt and iron. A rooftop in Ukraine, elbows screaming from lying prone for so long. Arms burning out one more pull-up as my fingers froze to a steel bar in Siberia. Then I’d hear some mechanical racket and sit up as fast as I could.

The racket was the Stairmaster. It was always the fucking Stairmaster.

Ricky had no job and no foreseeable need to attain one. But he had a Stairmaster. Every morning at sunrise Ricky dragged himself to the base of his machine, whirred it to life, and huffed himself up Everest and back down without ever moving a foot. Occasionally he’d be listening to motivational speeches or audiotapes while he did it. Mostly, it was Lynyrd Skynyrd. I usually threw up in the bathroom while this went on, admiring my scars in the toilet water reflection before I parted ways with my stomach lining.

Ricky’s living room consisted of a couch, a Stairmaster, an easy chair, and a TV. The TV was clearly mounted by Ricky, alone. He obviously hadn’t sprung for a studfinder, so the wall looked like the ones we used to line people in front of back in Kiev. The TV was probably ninety inches wide. It was the most expensive thing in the home. Well, maybe the Stairmaster cost more – I don’t know how much Stairmasters cost. The point is if you tried to rob Ricky there was nothing of value you could physically get out of the house unless you had calves like his.

After his workout Ricky would get a glass of ice water (“Aw, shoot,” he’d say, standing back up, “Let me grab you one.”) and come sit back down, sweat contouring his mullet around his lumpy head.

“Hey, man, where you from?” he asked the first time.

I wondered what the sign language for Russia was. Then I remembered there was no way in hell Ricky would know sign language. I pointed at my throat.

Ricky nodded knowingly.

You idiot. I pointed at my throat and shook my head no.

“Oh, I gotcha. You’re deaf?”

Jesus Christ.

“Hey, man,” Ricky asked one day. “You need anything?”

I raised an eyebrow. Ricky and I had learned how to converse with each other like that. He got used to my body language and I got used to the five second delay of turning Tennessee drawl into something resembling the
English I’d learned in a classroom.

Ricky was a gentleman. He paid for everything, which would’ve been more generous if he wasn’t loaded.

“I won the lottery a while back,” Ricky told me a few days into my Tennessee residency. “I chose the payout-every-month option, you know, for a lot of reasons. One, ain’t nobody needs that much money at once, you know? I’d probably just spend it on something stupid. And two…” Ricky’s eyes narrowed, and his hand absentely fell to the other one, rubbing at a tan line on a stubby ring finger.

*Alimony. The true killer in this house.*

I nodded. Usually Ricky would talk and talk, which was fine with me.

“Anyways, I try to live the same lifestyle, more or less,” he said, opening up a Natty Light. “I don’t think too highly of those people who, you know, win the lottery and forget all about their friends and family.”

*I’ve been here two weeks and only the mailman has come by to visit you.*

“Can’t forget who you are, man,” Ricky said as he leaned back the recliner, his gut pouring over his belt like a beer-belly Buddha. He stared at the TV, his face lit with the blue screen glow, looking everywhere and nowhere, at one with the quilt and the chair and the Stairmaster all at once.

*Tell me about it,* I said, fumbling for another Natty. The tab was easy to open even when you were piss drunk. This country does a few things well.

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I think a lot of women would’ve been uncomfortable going home with a guy alone from a bar. I wasn’t, mostly because killing Ricky in no way posed a problem to me, morally or practically, but also because he was pretty shy around women. Or maybe he was just shy around me. I didn’t really have a broad pool of data to draw from, here.

I was in the bathtub – which still smelled like homemade moonshine (or maybe that’s me), sitting up far enough that I could clean my pistol without getting it wet. I also had some bubbles in the bath. It was one of the few things I asked Ricky to spring for. I liked lavender.

It’s not really standard to clean a pistol in a bubble bath, but I didn’t care. I figured if I had to use it again, I’d just be using it on myself. I don’t think they’ll come looking. Nobody defects to places like this.

Ricky knocked on the door. “Hey, man,” he said. “You, uh, got feminine complications in there?”

It took about a minute of silence on the other side of the door for Ricky to remember I was mute. “Oh, shoot,” he muttered. “Um, okay. Hope it’s okay in there. If you uh, need anything.”

There was silence, like a subsonic round, or like a bad date. Or, you know.
I sunk lower in the bubble bath and reached for the beer next to me.

•••

“Dang, man,” Ricky said, pulling off his trucker’s hat and scratching at his mullet. “You’re a good shot. Just like Annie Oakley. Or that dude in them Jason Bourne movies.” He chewed on his cheek. The snow was falling around us, sticking to the wet ground in muddy clumps. Ricky had gotten a thirteen foot tall Christmas tree (“Shoot, man, it’s my favorite time of year!”) and strung up half his house with lights before running out. He was always going to run up to Home Depot and get the rest the next day.

You should see me shoot sober, I thought. I can hit a journalist from half a mile away. I handed Ricky back his rifle, an old lever-action .22 his grandfather had given him. .22. The Mossad used .22. Pussies.

Ricky walked over to the fence, his work boots crunching in the snow. The hair on his calves was standing up on end as the wind tugged at his cargo shorts. He pulled his heavy winter coat tighter and stacked up all the cans back up.

“Dang, man,” he said. Ricky thought it was tasteless to curse in front of a woman. “I never seen a lady shoot that good. Better than me, easy.” He chuckled, but the laughter trailed off. “My wife never liked guns.”

Ricky stared out across the snow, only his right side lit up from the half-assed Christmas lights he’d strung up. His mustache quivered for a moment as he opened his mouth a few times, starting to talk and stopping.

I nodded. That was all you did when Ricky said something about his wife. I mean, fuck it, I’m mute, that’s all I did anyways. I sipped at one of Ricky’s beers before putting it back down in the snow to stay cold.

“Alright, my turn,” Ricky said, taking a full minute to reload the rifle.

•••

Every few weeks Ricky would develop a new passion and he would devote himself entirely to it for seventy-two hours or so. Usually I could tell by what the audiobook he was listening to on the Stairmaster each morning was, or what channel he had on at night. That night it was politics.

We sipped at the beers. Ricky was on his first. I was on…well, I was drinking.

“These politicians, man,” Ricky said, shaking his head. It made his mullet sway with patriotic indignation. We were watching C-SPAN. I recognized a few Senators. They’d visited us in Moscow. “Nobody cares about the American people anymore.”

I wondered if Ricky could name the Secretary of State. To be fair, I only could because they’d priced out a hit on him a while back. But that was still something. I waved my hand at Ricky to grab his attention.
“Huh?” Ricky asked, taking his cap off and wiping his brow. Ricky could break a sweat sitting still, in February. “Jeopardy?”

I nodded. Jeopardy was good.

“Yeah, let’s do Jeopardy. I bet I’ll beat you tonight,” he said. “I’m just playing,” he added almost immediately, glancing to make sure I wasn’t offended.

I never buzz in, you beautiful idiot.

“It’s good having you around, man,” Ricky said. “I get lonely sometimes.” I leaned over and clinked my can against his. Ricky smiled.

• • •

Ricky got off the Stairmaster one morning. He looked down at his calves. He did a few tentative leg raises.

“Sharon always liked my calves,” he said. “You know that used to be a sign of fertility back in the day? For like, kings and stuff?”

Your country never had a king, I wanted to tell him. You people would talk less if you did.

Instead royal Ricky went and got some new cargo shorts.

• • •

It was September. “Now, listen,” Ricky said, as he tied a tie around his collar. It took him several attempts. Well, that’s redundant. I never saw Ricky do anything but that Stairmaster in one attempt. He fumbled into his suit jacket and attempted to situate it as well as a jacket two sizes too small could be. He squeezed into midnight black cargo shorts. “I know, you know, you’re not from here, but, I think this is an important day for all people, man.”

I nodded.

“You have any dress clothes?”

I have three fake passports and a rifle that breaks down and fits in a briefcase. Instead I shook my head.

“Huh,” Ricky said. “I don’t reckon I have any of Sharon’s. It…it wouldn’t be right anyways.”

I think the only way Sharon’s clothes would fit me would be if I ate Sharon.

Ricky led me outside and loaded the shells into his shotgun. Ricky was proud of his shotgun. He told me about how his great-grandfather used it in World War II. I’m sure he got to fire it at least once between you all showing up and us winning the war. We stood next to the pool, which had deflated since Ricky turned the water off. We slowly sunk into the mud the longer we stood. Ricky’s lawn had long since died as a result of being the flood banks of his aboveground pool and being buried under a few inches of pine needles. A ceramic deer stood at the edge of the woods, leaning against one of the trees with a missing front leg.
“For all those who died in the Twin Towers, and in the Pentagon, and all our veterans who perished fighting terror overseas.” He turned to me.

I raised a Natty. To everyone who ever knew too much.

Ricky raised the shotgun and fired both barrels. There was a thunder blast and a dull thud. A moment later a bald eagle dropped from the sky.

We both stared. It was a bloody mess. White and black feathers floated down around us like snow.

We stared.

“Oh...oh my God,” Ricky said, the shotgun dropping from his hands. It squelched in the mud. The bald eagle fumbled, trying to flap its one functioning wing. Its eyes bulged and rolled around, looking for something, a branch, a nest, maybe God. Instead it saw Ricky. I didn’t feel sorry for it until that moment.

I sipped at the Natty. Ricky knelt, covering its eyes with his red hat. “This...this is the worst day of my life. Oh my God. That was...I didn’t mean to...” He looked up at me with wide eyes.

I was sent to Ricky’s shed to get shovels as he attempted to ease the eagle’s passing. It took a long time to die, kicking up bloody feathers each time Ricky tried to hold it tighter, clawing the hell out of his suit. I came back, leaning on the shovel for support. Ricky finally stood, putting his hat back on. There were gouges across the too-tight dress shirt, mud and blood and beer across his dress pants, if we’re calling them that.

We spent a few hours digging out a grave. An eagle doesn’t need that big of a grave, but I didn’t bother telling Ricky. We carved out what could’ve served as a bird mausoleum. Every human rights activists I’d ever iced could’ve fit in that damn bird’s grave. Weeks of keeping his aboveground pool full had caused the kind of erosion in his backyard that usually takes tidal waves to accomplish. Ricky and I slid further down with each shovelful, the ground crumbling and melting away. Ricky tried in vain to keep the mud from seeping down and covering the eagle.

Getting out was a bitch. For Ricky. Not for me. I crouched and jumped up, landing with good form, bounce in my knees, all that. My old coach would be proud. I bet I could still do a back handspring if I had to. Not that I cared to, in front of Ricky.

“Dang, man,” Ricky said, his mourner’s solemnity broken for a moment. “You a dancer or something?” He paled. “Like a, like a ballet dancer, or something, not like an exotic performer. I mean, not assuming you’re doing ballet because you’re Russian, it could be any kind, really.”

Gymnast. I helped Ricky up and out of the mud pit we’d made. Ricky looked down at the bird and gathered his composure for a moment, the hoses
of the pool gurgling behind us, the cicadas chirping ahead of us. Both of us had sweated through our clothes, because apparently September is still summer here.

“You may be dead,” Ricky said, tears welling in his eyes. “But America lives on.”

He saluted, his hand shaking as he closed his eyes and fought back tears. I saluted too. The bird went out like a bitch, but I guess we all want someone to salute us when we die.

Ricky started to sing the national anthem, his drawl warbling and shaky. I went and got another Natty.

•••

We were floating in Ricky’s aboveground pool, looking up at the stars. When the garden hoses were gurgling at full strength, it was hard to hear Ricky sometimes. I saw a satellite blinking over Tennessee as it drifted. I wondered if it was one of ours or one of theirs. Whenever I’d start to float away from Ricky I’d hit the edge of the pool and float back.

“Hey, man,” Ricky said. “Stuff like this is pretty beautiful, isn’t it?”
Porcelain Doll
Annie Reigel
Photography
eternal
Kenny Nguyen
Photography
Bleeding Sky
Poetry • Reilly Murtaugh

7:00 am is kind in its coldness,
so I know walking through the world will hurt less than yesterday.
I look up from my life to see that the sky is bleeding,
her violence spread wide across her body for all to see.
She is screaming her trauma, and not even in her darkness
has she ever been this beautiful.
And that glorious red rage is outlined in gold
as the truth always is.

But 7:15 covers her mouth so she can’t scream and wipes her clean,
leaving a pale blue lady who sits cross-legged and smiles without teeth.
I want to bring her pain back out so she may be a painted threat again,
but it is too late. The day has dawned, and she has gone inside herself again.

I drive off in the morning’s procession,
mourning a voice lost to possession,
my heart beating in time with words I breathe—
I will be as brave as the bleeding sky today.
Thread Therapy
Sarah Dusek
Mixed media
Nasty Woman
Poetry • Mackenzie Smith

This piece originally appeared in print and online in PHEMME Zine.

Women,

\[ \text{you have to treat ‘em like shit.} \]

That’s how you get them to do what you want.

Because treating women with respect is unheard of.

\[ \text{I start kissing them.} \]
\[ \text{I don’t even wait.} \]
\[ \text{You can do anything.} \]

Because a woman’s consent is unheard of.

\[ \text{Grab ‘em by the pussy,} \]
\[ \text{you can do anything.} \]

I mean look at her,

she’s a

\[ \text{bimbo.} \]
\[ \text{Excuse me, did I just say that?} \]

But let’s be real.

Look at her,

\[ \text{you’d fuck her, wouldn’t you?} \]
\[ \text{I’d fuck her.} \]
\[ \text{C’mon, wouldn’t you?} \]

Look at her,

I heard she wants to make a decision for herself,

because she claims to suffer from back pain due to her large breasts.

\[ \text{Any woman who has a breast reduction is insane.} \]

Look at them,

women,

\[ \text{nasty women.} \]
They’re only good for one thing.

They’ll walk up,
and they’ll flip their top,
and they’ll flip their panties.

I hate it when she’s menstruating,

blood coming out of her wherever...

that doesn’t mean I have to wait.

Look at her,

a beautiful piece of ass.

Now, let’s look at
her.

Tall,
5’9,
long legs,

uh, yeah, those legs,

all I can see is the legs.

Thin,
dirty blonde hair,
tan,

oval shaped face,
hazel eyes,

20 years old.

She’s not beautiful,
she’s

flat chested.

Very hard to be a 10.
Woke White Boys
Nonfiction • Maddie De Pree

I once had sex in a boy’s room with multicolored Christmas lights on the walls and shelves full of vinyls, and while I should have found this cozy, instead I found it depressing, and the boy put on a Connie Francis record, and there was a baggie of cocaine in the corner, and it was not my baggie of cocaine. He turned me onto my side and we fucked, and I looked at the record player and watched the needle skimming over the grooves of the vinyl as it played *Who’s Sorry Now*.

By the time he was finished, the record had begun to make that dull knocking noise, the sound of no more sound; and as I laid in his dirty bed, it occurred to me that I had made a poor decision. But I had gotten what I wanted; I had only gone home with him to make someone else mad.

•••

Later that year I had sex with a different boy in a different place, and he wanted me to tie him up with black cord, which I did not want to do but did anyway; and when I waved him away the following morning, I thought, *Thank God, I never have to hear from this person again!* Before he left, he mashed his mouth against mine and whipped his tongue around like a dog’s, and I stood there with my eyes open and wondered, *Why do people do this, why do we do anything at all.*

I heard from him often the following summer, and though I didn’t answer his calls, he kept calling, mostly to ask if I would ever peg him, and why didn’t he receive more Tinder matches, and what are women so scared of when the world is full of nice men like him.

•••

Before these boys was another boy, one who wanted me to explain things to him, like the word queer and the differences between gender and sexuality and sex; and when he saw my body, he said *You’re so beautiful, you’re so hot,* in a voice that sounded more dismayed than anything else. Afterward, he said that I was not dateable, for reasons that he did not fully understand; and as I walked home, I thought, *I should have stolen something from his apartment on my way out.*

When I flirted with women in front of this boy, he would become irate and then miserable; he would trudge away, and I wouldn’t go after him. But for some reason I loved him, would have tied him up with black cord if he’d wanted me to; but he never asked; he never asks.
Buenos Días Niña
Poetry • Kelsey Milian

17 stops.
Palmetto Station to Douglas Road.
30 minutes of music that seem to cloud
my thoughts with summer plans.

The city is hot and humid.
Today more than ever before.

I sit down next to large handbags
cheap Flats
and Petite Women.

They remind me of an alternate universe.
My life
and my mother’s life.

They stand here as early as 6:15am.
Conversation after conversation.
Bus after bus taking them to Hialeah.
Taking them home.

A new brown skinned woman approaches
the bench every 15 minutes.
Besos, names, and preguntas about how their families are doing
Are the normal intros exchanged.

I sat there and listened to their conversations,
forgetting their laundry upon reaching Hialeah.
Working in a new house in Coral Gables.

But it hit me.

To the point that I began to taste
the salty drops of my subtle tears.

They were the maids.
Las que take care of
your children.
Las que spend hours cleaning
the homes they wish to own one day.

My mother was one, a time before I appeared.
A life we would have continued if opportunity was not earned.

But
my destiny was different.
I sat at that bus stop to take
the next route to a future mis papas
dreamed for me.

Lo que soñaron para us.

Those women remind me of a culture and people
I refuse to forget.
Respecting what they do,
their sacrifice and ganas
goes noticed.

I hope mis sueños go noticed too.
Overthinking
Ren Zimmerman
Digital Art
When a bird dives from a powerline, it lands on its feet

Poetry • Sally Cannon

My chest, it never stops hurting me these days, like a bird growing but not quite ready (read willing) to fracture its shell. Somehow the pecking at my ribcage takes second place, though, to the lake of tar—that weight in my bloodstream, coagulating. The birds use it to cement their nests to my spinal cord, wingbeats making waves in my stomach. Maybe that’s why I can’t sleep or why when my eyes crack open I can’t wait to go back to bed—her pursed lips dam the flowing flowing flowing of symptoms—

Maybe this is all just inside your head
she says, Come back soon if nothing changes
Make Me Like Mike
Olivia White
Photography
The Goldfish Bowl at the End of the Earth
Fiction • Gerrard Hanly

If there had been anyone for miles in any direction to look, they would have seen Miss Fortune as a shapelessly small point in the sky, crawling far above the vast geometric quilt of the Pacific. As such, the eternal bass groan of the B-25’s fat twin propeller engines was audible only to her crew. Deafeningly so. Which was a blessing, truthfully, because Dullahan hadn’t fucking shut up ever since he’d found the totem. He’d always been a twitchy little bastard, even before Wake Island, and after Wake he’d been nearly insufferable. But now, he was tuned to a whole different frequency. Now he was just a complete goddamn creep.

The totem, a fist-sized idol of a Japanese god cut from tar-colored volcanic rock, had grown in Dullahan’s eyes until it filled the scope of his existence. Dullahan, who was a real, living human being, flesh and eyes where the totem had obsidian and a set of beady, glittering pearls. He talked to it, he laughed with it, he recited Shakespeare to it. It moved, without deviation, from the oil stained pit of his shirt pocket into his powder-black hands and then right back again, and Danby nearly got his thumb bitten off just trying to get it away from him.

Dullahan was the B-25’s ball turret gunner. He used to sleep in the ball turret some nights they were on patrol, his flight jacket wadded up for a pillow. Now he spent all his time in there, and he didn’t spend any of it sleeping. My little goldfish bowl, he used to call the acrylic bubble. It was a good joke the first few times. It had gotten stale after a while, sure, but he’d kept it going anyway, even after Wake. But now he didn’t say it anymore, and when the others did, they didn’t say it with a whole lot of humor. They’d talk about fucking Dullahan
and his goddamn goldfish bowl. For instance:

“Where’s Dullahan?”

“Fucking Dullahan? His goddamn goldfish bowl, where else do you think?”

The words had all the qualities of brimstone as they left Messner’s mouth. Lippmann turned to leave the lieutenant to himself, sorry he’d broken the sullen quiet that had settled over the crew. Then he realized that the only alternative to Messner’s wrath was the red-eyed melancholy of the others (or, of course, Dullahan’s inexhaustible bugshit insanity), so he opted to remain in the company of the pilot. At least boiler-pot rage could be entertaining.

Messner sat on a salt-eaten oil drum toppled over onto its side in the sand, map spread taut across his knees. Lippmann looked back at Miss Fortune. Her radio operator and co-pilot sat on one great dull green wing, sharing a cigarette. Smiling lasciviously down at them was Miss Fortune’s namesake, a pinup doll taken straight from an old Esquire and painted in repose just behind the cockpit, long legs and sequined skirt and cherry colored nipples, so abruptly beautiful on this crumbling tarmac, amidst this torched jungle, that she seemed fit to be on a cathedral ceiling. And beneath it all, cloistered in the shade of the bomber’s underbelly, her ball-turret gunner ranted and raved in his goldfish bowl.

They touched down on a new dot in the Pacific every other day, but Dullahan still preferred his goldfish bowl, dangling from his gunner’s stirrups or just curling up on the bare glass bottom like a dead bug in a lightbulb. He didn’t get out for the dense sweaty jungles; he didn’t get out for the island-sized ashtrays as burnt out as the whole crew felt. This one was somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, the green tangle punctured by grey wounds that smelled of cordite. He hadn’t gotten out here, either.

“How close to the Saratoga you reckon we are?” Lippmann eventually asked.

Messner took a second, sighed at the map, then wiped at his nose with the back of his hand and looked up at him.

“Three days, Lipp. If God even bothers to look at this part of the fuckin’ planet anymore.”

Sleep deprivation and the acrid miasma of gunpowder that permeated Miss Fortune’s cabin could have explained the stinging red halos that ringed all the airmen’s eyes, but each of them knew as well as the others that they all cried whenever they found themselves alone. All except for Dullahan.

Dullahan cried a lot after Wake, but then he found that Japanese statue, and now he just laughed. Like he did that one night, the night after they’d been separated from the squadron, when out of the dark a boiling horde of seagulls
came sailing right at them. Gulls don’t fly that high or in that many numbers, but there they were, tearing headlong right into them, bursting against the cockpit fuselage and obliterating themselves in the scream of the propellers and it was like they wanted to get inside and Dullahan was laughing so hard he couldn’t breathe and for Christ’s sake Messner, can’t you shut him up, just shut him the fuck up, just for a fucking minute? Finally Messner did, marching to the ball-turret with his eyes and nose streaming and pulling the hatch open and punching Dullahan so hard they all thought he was dead until he woke up the next morning. Still laughing. He always fucking laughed.

Dullahan would talk to Lippmann sometimes, probably because Lippmann still cared. Lippmann was younger than the others, and it was the first time he’d lost a friend without them being dead, so it stood to reason. Dullahan would take one knuckle and tap at the inside of the ball turret’s hatch when he wanted to talk, and he’d only open up for Lippmann. He wouldn’t talk to Taggert or Danby, and Messner never went near the goddamn goldfish bowl anymore.

It could be that that’s why Lippmann was the one who went to the goldfish bowl that night, the night after Messner had said three days. Out of the dark, a noise came, a quick heavy staccato that pounded against the bomber’s fuselage, then came again, and again. For a silent, nauseous minute they thought they had flown into another run of seagulls before they realized that they were being shot at.

The silver-skinned fighters came shrieking out of the night at the bomber, punching sucking portals to the stratosphere in its hull. Messner and Danby quietly sweated over the Byzantine flight controls like a pair of church organists. Taggert sent obscenities and tracer rounds flying out into the black from the tail gun, both about equally likely to reach their target. And Lippmann stood over Dullahan’s goldfish bowl, jaw tight, holding a spanner from the repair kit like a club. There was nothing but quiet from below. He needed to get Dullahan out, and he needed the heavy guns that the lunatic was sitting on top of. Or everyone is going to die. In one great burst of impetus, he grabbed the hatch and pulled it open.

There was a hole in the bottom of the goldfish bowl. A perfect circle, the kind of thing that some kid might do to his neighbor’s window with a baseball, and Dullahan was dribbling out of it. Lippmann let the hatch and the wrench drop, but couldn’t get his hands up in time to keep from retching. He contemplated the mess on the cabin floor before easing the hatch back open again to see the mess that was below it. The phosphorus round glowed ember-like, whistling smoke from where it burrowed into Dullahan and died without detonating. In what looked like Dullahan’s lap sat the idol, blood black on the
black rock, eyeing Lippman with its gleaming pearls. He let the hatch slam shut again and sat down on top of it. The shouts and gunfire from Taggert in the rear had stopped. So had the droning wails from outside the bomber. As the thunder of his own pulse in his ears slowly calmed, Lippmann realized that no other sound remained.

No. No, that wasn’t true. Faintly, something took up where the clatter of the dogfight had been a second before. It was faint beneath the bass line of the propellers, but it was still there. Oh Christ, it was there.

Laughing. There was laughing from under the hatch, down in the ball-turret. Down in Dullahan’s goldfish bowl. Steadily rising in pitch and mania like the screech of a kettle. And then, right under where Lippmann sat, past a mere inch of sheet metal, there came a tapping. The gentle tapping of a single knuckle.

The flying metal tube filled with screams, but for miles around the only sound was the deep monotone bellow of its engines, and, beyond that, nothing but the calm breath of the Pacific.
Basking
Olivia Corso
Ink drawing
Mountain Waterfall
Caroline Bass
Ink drawing
Viktor

Poetry • Olivia Oliver

My grandmother’s death was roses
Her brittle bones beneath bedsheets
like thorns
Her last breath light gardens breeze
Her cheeks even held their rosy glow
and her hands their petal softness
When they at last shriveled and fell
Organic fragility of a life full bloomed

I even snacked on rose petals in the church hall
Too young to lose my appetite

But your death is cold hard steel
of gunmetal between blue lips
It is the sound of your fathers thunderous
pounding at the bathroom door
then the clink of the shell
and the scent of iron seeping beneath it
what remains of you—all machines
wires, fluorescents, and ammonia floor
adamantine chill of a life gone too soon

A sign that reads “No eating in the ICU”
Serves no purpose
The Language of Decay
Olivia Corso
Photography
The Ballad of Dean Corll

Poetry • Gerrard Hanly

By 1973, the petroleum industry had made Houston an opulent modern metropolis. It had suddenly become the sixth-largest city in the United States, with the third-most rapid population growth, behind only New York and Chicago. It also had the highest murder rate per capita of any city in the nation.

An indelible smog
and the white facades of the grain elevators
make this place shift and dance on the horizon
like the heat-puddles on the highway.
The whole city is built on corpses.

Look in its foundation,
there are living things, rotting in their slumber,
seeping into the concrete,
slipping out from that sunken dark
into a different, deeper sort.

But he wasn’t always to blame; he was sweet,
He always combed his hair.
Fathers passed through, setting up franchises before moving on to the coast, while his mother cried in her room.
She was washing plates when the phone rang.

28 people,
boys, no less,
with their three-speed bikes,
their summer jobs
Oh, dear God.

But even worse is that when I am my best,
I look identical to him.
If you dug up my boat shed,
you’d find the ribcage of something I’ve hid.
Helio
Catherine Sigman
Photography
Sunny Acres

Fiction • Sarah Miller

We’re going to Sunny Acres today. We always go, every year when it’s Halloween time. I like pumpkins, and so does Mom, so we go to Sunny Acres. It’s the pumpkin patch. There are so many pumpkins at Sunny Acres. I like the short fat ones, but Mom says they’re not good for making jack-o-lanterns because they’re too round. Mom doesn’t let me make jack-o-lanterns by myself. She says I’ll cut my finger, but I do get to pull the guts out of the pumpkin’s belly. Or maybe it’s the pumpkin’s head. I think it’s the head because when you make it into a jack-o-lantern, it has a face. It has triangle eyes and a smile. Bellies don’t have eyes and smiles. I like how squishy the guts are and how I can squeeze them really hard in my fist and they come out between my fingers.

Mom smiles a lot. Every time I look at her she is smiling. A big smile to tell me she loves me. Today, she smiles so big because we are going to Sunny Acres to get pumpkins. We take the red truck, and it rumbles a lot, really loud like if it were a giant cat and you pet it and it purred. Mom says when cats purr, it’s like they’re smiling at you because they don’t know how to smile with their teeth. The red truck shakes and black smoke sometimes comes out of the pipe thing in the back. I can see it in the mirror out my window. Usually, when the black smoke comes out, the people in the car behind us make a face. I made a face when I was littler, but I don’t care about the black smoke anymore. There’s black smoke now. I don’t make a face, I just smile like Mom, and she smiles at me still because she’s so happy that I’m smiling.

We drive by a lot of fields. I think they’re supposed to have corn, but there isn’t any corn. I don’t like corn, so I don’t care if there’s no more. We drive by little houses that look pretty old. We keep driving for a long time. There’s a
stop sign up there, so I point at it and say STOP just to make sure Mom knows there’s a stop sign. She smiles, glad that I reminded her to stop. I look at the wooden house outside my window and it is white, but the paint is coming off so it’s really more brown. I guess the wooden house is brown, but it has some white paint stuck on it. The front door is brown too, but it has some black paint stuck on it. And the shutters. The roof has parts of it gone. The rocking chairs on the porch are empty. They look like they’re begging someone to sit down and rock and rock and rock and rock. But no one is rocking. I look at the house for a long time, and then Mom goes. I always remind her to go, but I forgot this time. She still smiles though because she is not mad at me for forgetting. We only drive for a little bit more, and then I see the big green sign with SUNNY ACRES on it. The driveway is gravel. Gravel makes popping sounds when you drive on it, like when you put popcorn in the microwave. After we park, I get out and put my feet on the gravel. I roll it around with the bottom of my shoe. I draw a smiley face in the dirt on the window. The red truck is covered in brown.

Last time we came to Sunny Acres it was really windy and Mom pretended she was getting blown away. I always can tell when she’s pretending. This time it’s really still and quiet. The tree branches aren’t even moving, which makes me a little bit sad. When they move, Mom says they’re waving at me, and I like to wave back. But I guess the trees are sleeping today. I lean way backwards and look at the sky. I can’t see any clouds. It just looks all the same color. It’s sort of white but also sort of grey. Maybe that’s why no one else came to Sunny Acres today because they don’t like when the sky looks sort of white and sort of grey. I have to squint, even though there’s no sun. I look at Mom, and she is smiling at me huge because she is so happy that we are here at the pumpkin patch. Mom loves pumpkins.

I run to the big field where all the pumpkins are, and I stop running when I get there. There are so many pumpkins at Sunny Acres. I see a short fat one, so I bend over and look, but it has fuzzy black and white stuff stuck all over it, and it seems squishy and there’s holes in it. One of the holes is really big, and the whole half of the pumpkin is down inside the whole. I stand back up and keep going and looking at pumpkins, but I see another ugly one and another ugly one and another ugly one and another ugly one and more and more ugly ones. They all have holes and black stuff and white stuff and they look like basketballs without all the air inside. I walk faster because I want to get to the good pumpkins, the orange and round ones. I see more ugly pumpkins, so I walk faster. All of them are still mushy and wrinkly. It looks like someone took bites out of all the mushy pumpkins. I smell something really bad, so I run because I want to get to the good pumpkins and I don’t want to smell that smell anymore. I run
faster. It smells bad. The pumpkins are ugly. I run until I get to the little fence.

I turn around, and Mom is standing at the other end of the field. She is smiling because she loves pumpkins. She will be so sad when she sees how ugly the pumpkins are. She walks toward me with a big smile to tell me she loves me. She is walking really slow. And she is smiling. She smiles while she bends over and looks at a tall, skinny pumpkin. She will be so sad when she sees that it is ugly and covered in black and white stuff and has holes in it. It is really soft, so it squashes down and wrinkles up when she puts her hands on it. She smiles while she picks it up and holds it on her chest like she loves it. She walks toward the fence where I am, and she smiles while she does it. She smiles while she walks really slow. She smiles really big while she looks at me.

The fence is almost as tall as me. My feet fit between the wires. I scratch my arm on a pointy end of a wire while I climb down on the other side. Mom is still looking at me through the fence. She is still looking at me and smiling so big and walking towards me. Her face looks like a mask of her own face. It looks different. I’m scared. I turn around and run. Really fast. My right shoe comes off. I don’t look at it. I run faster. I turn my head around, and she’s on this side of the fence, but she’s still walking so slow. And smiling. I keep running. I run and run and run and run. I turn my head around again, and she is right behind me. She could touch me. She walks slow and smiles. How did she catch up to me? I turn around and run faster than I’ve ever run in my whole life.

I run through some woods. Sometimes my right foot steps on a stick and it hurts. I run. Faster until the woods aren’t woods. I turn around, and no one is behind me. I see the back of a white house that is mostly brown. And I see a stop sign. I walk around the house. There are two empty rocking chairs on the porch. They are begging. I don’t see any cars. Maybe no one’s home. I knock on the brown front door with black paint stuck on it. The door opens and makes a creaking noise. It sounds like it’s screaming or something. I hate it. I hate it. And she is there. She is smiling at me. She is inside the house, and she is looking at me, and she is smiling at me. She is smiling so big at me. To tell me she loves me. Her eyes look like triangles. She is smiling because she loves me. Her eyes are like triangles.
Ant
Jordan Winiski
Ceramics

Ant Support
Jordan Winiski
Ceramics
the audacity
Poetry • Isabella Quiros

excuse me
that is my
  unassigned
  assigned
  seat

so
get up.

the audacity.
Summer on the Mountain
Sarah Murdaugh
Digital illustration
Out Fishing
Nonfiction • Sarah Miller

Papaw loved to fish. Mamaw, too, but her interest seemed more like an offshoot of her husband’s. An OUT FISHING sign greeted visitors at the front door, but you could usually find Mamaw on the left side of the couch, watching Animal Planet from her sunken throne, while Papaw “rested his eyes” next to her or, on work days, pushed carts up and down the halls of Baptist Hospital. They had a boat—I never saw it—that they’d take out on the lake in the early hours of the morning. I’d imagine the two of them in a wooden canoe on a placid, ethereal sheet of blue glass, fishing line piercing the surface like an acupuncture needle, vessel tipping back and forth on a rippling melody, softly, so as not to wake the earth. I know now that the reality was less like a painted silhouette than I thought then—but my fantastical imagination was less inclined to envision Papaw driving his motorized fishing boat out of a densely packed marina and into the polluted brown lakewater.

When I was really young, they’d take me fishing at Cove Park sometimes. Mamaw would pack me a paper bag lunch with a cheese sandwich and crackers and a fruit cup. We’d take two fishing poles: my little pink one and an adult sized one. Papaw’s gentle, sun-spotted face would beam as he packed the poles in the trunk, and beam as he’d put half a worm on the hook. He’d even beam as I decided fifteen minutes after arriving that I was ready to eat my lunch at 10:30 in the morning. That baby’s hungry, he’d say. Babe, she just ate breakfast, she’d say. Bob, give her that cheese sandwich, he’d say and smile at me. Something like that. Everyone called Papaw “Babe” and Mamaw “Bob.”

I’d sit on the park bench next to Mamaw, who usually didn’t fish on
these outings. Wrinkled hands and curved, yellow fingernails adorned with chipped red paint would hand me the paper bag, rolled up at the top. I’d unroll it eagerly, reach inside, and catch the cheese sandwich in my tiny grip like it would escape if I wasn’t quick enough. I was much more interested in the cheese sandwich than in the actual fishing part. Most of fishing was waiting, which was boring. Fifteen minutes felt like a day’s work. And then, even if I did feel a little tug on the line, I didn’t actually want to catch the fish. I hated seeing the hook poking through the mouth of the helpless thing while he flopped and struggled, desperate gills working for nothing. I knew he had been hungry, just like me. What if I had reached into that paper bag and felt a hook go through the center of my palm? Papaw always told me it was okay and that we weren’t hurting him, but I didn’t understand how a hook through the skin could be painless.

•••

As I got older, we stopped going to Cove Park, and I lost my appetite for cold cheese sandwiches. I’d visit them about once a month, and when I did, I’d want to lie in their bed and watch old black-and-white TV shows while they sat in the other room. I had grown too old for the innocence of imagination, too lazy for small talk. Once my mom got me a cell phone, Papaw would leave me frequent voicemails. Sarah, call me. Bye. I usually didn’t, but when I did, I could hear that he was beaming at the sound of my voice. I could also hear desperation, pleading, the sorrow of being forgotten.

Papaw got shingles. When I did venture out of the bedroom to sit on the couch between them, I’d look at him and see his tired face twisted in pain. He’d take off his glasses and rub his eyes with his thumb and index finger. I’d ask him if he was okay. Shingles, he’d say and smile a feeble attempt at assurance. Months passed. He didn’t get better. Dad said shingles didn’t last that long. Then the doctor said he had lung cancer. He hadn’t smoked in years, but he had lung cancer. He spent more and more time at the hospital, and I’d go see him, try to smile and make positive conversation with a weak, hospital gown-wearing shell of a man. He tried to keep radiating gentle joy like he always had. He really tried. I told myself that when he got better, I’d go fishing with him, and I’d wait for the little tug, reel it in, and tell him that I understood why he loved fishing so much, though I still don’t.

Visiting Papaw in hospice was the worst part of all this. I remember Mom and I walking into a quiet room lit only by the sterile light in the hallway. A ghostly old man lay on his back in a small bed, taking up too little space in the center of a too-big room. His mouth was open, searching for air like a fish that had been lying on the shore for far too long. Mom walked to his side and took his cold hand. Hi, Daddy. Her whisper filled the empty space. I floated at the
foot of the bed, trying trying to look at his face, which was now more like the fossil of a kind fisherman. Mom took one of the pink sponges on a stick from a table next to his bed and brought it to his lips. I thought I saw his mouth move a little. Grateful, desperate. Sarah’s here. She motioned for me to take his other hand.

I moved my legs (through air that felt as cold and dense as icy water) to the other side of the bed and reached my arm out to take his other frozen hand. I wished that I’d feel his fingers close around my palm, but I didn’t. I don’t know if he knew we were there. Mom and I both stood, floated, and forced our blurred gazes on his face, our hot tears making spots on a white comforter. I wanted to tell him I loved him. I wanted to tell him I was sorry for not calling him back, for not spending more time watching Animal Planet on the couch with him and Mamaw, for never going out on his boat even though he asked me to. But I didn’t. I couldn’t.

When I found out Papaw had finally passed away, I didn’t cry. It felt more like relief. I went to school that day, sat through English and chemistry. I didn’t tell my friends because I thought they would find me cruel and unfeeling for not being unraveled by grief.

His funeral was open-casket, but I couldn’t look. I couldn’t see that fossil of a face again. Regret clutched my heart in a fist, and I knew that if I got any closer than the second-row pew, it would burst it like a bloody balloon.

It’s hard to say how many times I sat on the bathroom tile, phone in hand, sobbing against the locked door. Sarah, call me. Bye. I’d listen to voicemail after voicemail. Sarah. Please call me. I love you. Bye. Sometimes I really would call his number, hoping that I’d hear his voice on the other line. But of course, it always went to voicemail, and I’d hear the greeting I’d recorded for him years before. This is Clarence Beets. Sorry I couldn’t answer the phone! Bye! I don’t know why Mamaw still paid the bills for that phone. I guess she couldn’t let go either.

We visited Mamaw more frequently after that. She seemed to get crazier and more paranoid each time we saw her. She was sure that the government was watching her with a drone through the window. She kept a gun and a ziplock bag of mismatched bullets on the table next to her, even when Dad and I would visit with my little step brother and half-brother, who were probably 7 and 4 at the time. We would drive her to K-Mart sometimes since she couldn’t drive herself. Her vision was bad, her motor skills were poor, and I doubt that she could have even reached the pedals. (She got shorter and shorter as she aged. By the time she died, she was about the same height as my step-brother...
and at least a foot shorter than my own 5’1’’.)

Mamaw’s death didn’t break me in the same way. There was something vain and cruel about her. She’d look at her own reflection in a handheld mirror about twenty times a day. She’d let her pancakes soak in the grease for a long time, and they’d always make me sick. She’d criticize Papaw’s kindness and scold him for falling asleep on the couch. I looked at her corpse, dressed up and posed in a casket, and I didn’t feel much. Is that terrible? My older sister cried, and I rubbed her shoulders, but I couldn’t conjure up a single tear.

I have a framed picture of Papaw and me in my room. He’s crouching next to me, smiling under an orange University of Tennessee ball cap. His right arm is on my shoulder, and his left holds up a fishing line with a green-blue scaled prize dangling on the end. I’m smiling, too. I don’t care about the hook through the mouth of the hungry creature we’ve fooled. I’m proud of myself. He’s proud of me. Mamaw is behind the disposable Kodak camera, probably sporting a knit green tank top and cotton navy shorts, bleached blonde hair hardened by layers of hairspray. I can see our favorite park bench in the corner of the frame, decorated with a crumpled paper bag. I’d already eaten my cheese sandwich by then.
trash bucket
Poetry • Mary Shelley Reid

front seat of a buick lesabre,
hole where the old console used to be.
plastic brown bucket on the floor beside my feet,
nine by nine by nine inches—
nine traces of me spilling out.

one:
coke zero can, half-drunk,
the rest poured out in a parking lot.
it once fell beneath the gas pedal.

two:
sticky note with mom’s old grocery list;
coffee, coffee creamer, beer,
three essentials of sanity.

three:
newspaper scrap with my face,
set on the dash to show my grandfather
the day he died.

four:
scribbled lyrics that had moved me;
that day the rain had forced me to pull over,
drops drummed in beat with the radio.

five:
dollar store sunglasses—scratched, faded;
i’d worn them in the drive-thru
so the man couldn’t see my eyes.

six:
empty aerosol pepper spray can,
keychain attached to it rusty and brittle;
if i touched it, i could smell it.
seven:
brochure picked up at a gift shop,
‘features of the grand canyon,’
paper sharp and pristine.

eight:
copy of a lease, never signed;
it’s supposed to be in the boxes in the trunk
to remind me where i am going.

nine:
a faded photo—his face barely there,
but i need to see it to remind me—
this is why i’m running.

front seat of a buick lesabre,
drive and resolve where complacency used to be.
plastic brown bucket on the floor beside my feet;
the things that i’ve carried around
have become the essence of me.
In This World There Are Many Living Things And Lots of Dead Things Too

Fiction • Paul Bryant

“Do you want to see Benny?”

I nod my head. Benny is our pet tarantula. Mom is afraid of spiders, but I always wanted one. Dad gave Benny to me for my fifth birthday this year. I woke up and walked into the dining room and saw a terrarium on the table. Inside it was a brown haired spider crawling over fish tank gravel.

Dad taught me all about Benny. He said that Benny was a rose hair tarantula. He said that rose hairs are picky eaters like me, but are the most docile spiders on Earth, unlike the Goliath bird eating spider he keeps as his classroom’s pet. I asked him what docile meant. He said that rose hairs don’t shout and argue about every little thing like Mom does, which I guess is true because I have never heard Benny talk.

I see a cricket under Benny’s fangs. Benny holds it there, every now and then shifting his teeth around the insect, feeling for taste. Benny slowly walks to the corner of the terrarium and I notice something thin and brown on the fish tank gravel. It looks like dead skin on the bottom of a sea floor. I point to it.

“What’s that?”

“That’s the shell of the last cricket he ate.”

I thought shells were supposed to be hard to break. They are the things that turtles and lobsters have, and as Dad told me, both these animals live for a long time. Shells shouldn’t be soft and papery.

I hear the chugging of the golf cart’s engine and realize that Dad is no longer in the shed. I hear his voice from outside.

“I thought you wanted to ride around the yard?”
Dad plops himself onto the seat and I sit on his knee. My fingers squeeze the steering wheel. Dad’s foot on the gas. The rose bushes blur around me as I drive the beat up golf cart across the silver grass in our yard.

I glance up at Dad and smile at eyes wrinkled with laugh lines. I steer the golf cart past a dying plum tree, past our tin shed, past our above ground pool, into view of the cemetery past our backyard. Ghosts are supposed to live here. But on days like this, when the sun tickles the trees, and leaves brush against bark, the tombstones are beautiful. They look like little homes of gnomes. I want to sit beside one, and run the ancient stone through my fingers.

“Woah boy!”

A great tree trunk is a foot from my face. Dad hits the brakes. I lurch forward, and hands clamp onto my shoulders. I hear the denting of plastic. Dad picks me up and it hurts a little, so I squirm. He sets me down on the hard grass. I turn towards him to see a hairy spider on his balding head. I see fangs pucker up. They are knives with bristles. I can see that its fangs will expand and wrap themselves around Dad’s body and Dad will start twitching, his boots dangling in the air. Then he will be still, and the spider will touch his body all over with its fangs. Dad’s skin will sag to the ground, painting the lawn with flesh. His eyes will turn into liquid marshmallows, sleeping in the holes of his head. And Dad will be dead.

But Dad just sighs and wipes the spider off his head. It falls to the ground with a plunk and swiftly climbs back up the tree.

Dad looks at the dent in the golf cart. Then he looks at the tree. The tree is intact. The plastic is not. I start to feel blood rush to my ears and I hear my breathing. Fast shallow breaths.

I whisper, “Hey Dad.”

He doesn’t hear me. He crouches down and places his firm fingers over the crater where a brand name used to be. I am shaking now. It is summer, but I feel cold. More blood rushes to my ears.

“How Dad.”

“Hm?”

He looks at me over the dented plastic. His lips are pursed and the hair he has left snakes in the wind.

“You could have died, Dad.”

He stands up, brushing off his spotless black jeans. He laughs.

“Just make sure you keep your eyes on the road next time.”

I look at the old gray lawn. I can’t stand anymore. My legs lurch my body down onto the ground in crisscross position. My fingers pick at blades of grass.

“I could have killed you.”
I hear his boots and then a huff. I look up to see him pull his legs into crisscross position.

“The golf cart wasn’t going fast enough to do anything.”

“But the spider.”

He smiles. A smile I’ve never seen before. A smile so wide it highlights every wrinkle on his mouth, cheeks, and forehead. He turns his torso back to the tree. I can see the spider sitting on the bark.

“That spider is a Bold Jumping Spider. It was probably scared to death when we hit the tree so it jumped on my head. It was a female too because it was about an inch. Might have had eggs up in that tree. Even if she bit, I’d only be itchy for a couple of days. Nothing life threatening.”

He grunts as he gets up. He reaches out a hand and I take it.

“Go on inside now.”

As I walk, I peek back towards the cemetery. The stones are chipped and some are jagged. One tombstone is shaped like a diamond and it seems soft. If I were to touch it, it would crumble. Ashes of dust in my hands.
Tree Terrain
Caroline Bass
Photography
front porch dolor

Poetry • Sarah Miller

i am

cold between
the arms of this rocking
chair wishing the arms were
softer covered in hair and
freckles—like cinnamon—
but don’t touch me i am so
full of every night’s
dinner so full of butter
and breadcrumbs so full
of empty do not TOUCH
me i’ll pop flour
and eggshells will fly
up in a mushroom
cloud tangle with mist in the
air tingly mist dull
pricks i exist only in the worst
way in the worst way and in
the worst
way i reach out to you only
so my palms can press hard
against your chest push
hard send you flying sprawling

aching

my shell is so
brittle and my inside runny
don’t touch me come
closer so that i can press into you
press into your body with
the hot stoveyes on my hands
and then
you’ll stop
touching everything
like you always do
in the worst way
like you always
do come closer with soft
arms and hair and
freckles i am so
cold
Lipstick
Gabby Villagran
Photography
Blush
Gabby Villagran
Photography
The Lampshade

Poetry • Evan Myers

1.
I said I love you to the lampshade.
It was time for goodnight.

I said I love you to the lampshade.
And then turned off the light.

I said I love you to the lampshade.
Because she was as empty as I was.

I said I love you to the lampshade.
Because I loved her.

I am not sure what I expected
from the lampshade in reply.

I am not sure why
I wanted her in the darkness of that room.

2.

The red lines on the digital clock next to my bed read 3:35.

I had just fallen asleep.

Lampshade in my arms.

Bathroom door slightly cracked.

Latch latched.

Alarm on.

Love won.

3.

7:15. I was awake.
The curtains were closed, but

Light was flooding the room

My crumb cakes eyes stretched for a switch

Arms still asleep, stuck in an embrace

Around nothing.

The alarm was sounding.

The latch was unlatched.

The bathroom door was shut, the front door was open.

Outside, on the balcony that looked directly upon the motel parking lot

My car was missing.

All that remained was a round bulb

A burning filament

And a stock wooden body.

The shade was gone. It had gotten up and left.

Now it was not so special.

Her light alone
too bright for me.

Eventually my eyes adjusted.
I picked up my empty suitcase and called a cab.
Maybe It’s Better That Way
Ren Zimmerman
Marker
when the party’s over
Sophie Harris
Photography