

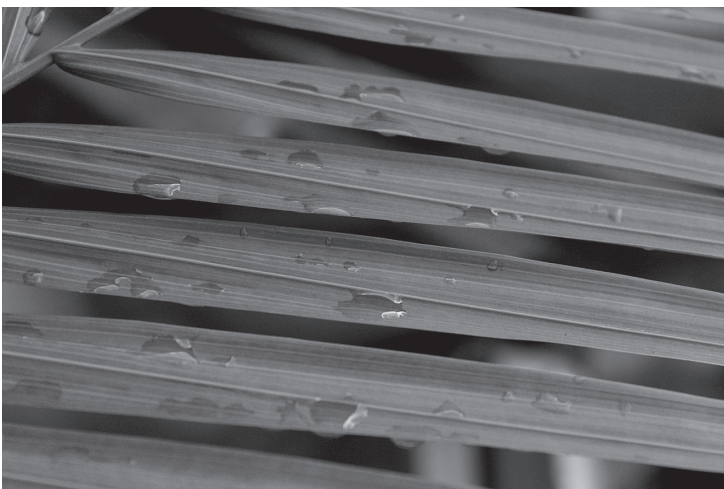
“Don’t talk to me like that, woman.” He slapped her, the mark staining her face with an angry red handprint.

“You know there’s no need for that, Shelton,” she said, holding back tears, “especially around Chester.”

Her impotent protest enraged him. He smacked her across her face, her back, and her head again and again. She fell to the ground sobbing and pleading with him to stop, but he was determined to go on until his rage had been satiated.

“Stop! Stop! She didn’t do anything!”

Before he could react, Chester’s father redirected his blows. The blood tasted familiar in Chester’s mouth, and the beating came so quickly that there was no time to feel pain. When it finally ended, Chester stood, bruised and bloody. He limped to the potato shed in the backyard, crouched down, and began to crawl under it, too afraid to go inside the house. He saw his father stumble into the house while his mother lay on the ground sobbing just before his head passed under the shed. The night air was crisp, and his head pounded, and the dirt was cold under his overalls. Chester lay under the shed shivering, tears streaming down his cheeks, and wondered to himself what other kids’ birthdays were like. △



Window of Leaves

Honorable Mention—Photography

Catherine Boltz

King Street

“Down in the holler / Where folks are real.”

Abby Strain

—Poetry Contest

I come from a place of plywood windows
and houses painted with garish colors,
where proper grammar is as rare as
a house without electrical problems.
With thin walls and slurred vocabulary,
everyone is always fixin’ to get their life together,
and yet, they all make the same bed every morning.

I am hiding behind this shoplifted identity
of a promising individual,
as if I was raised in a brick house—
as if my future will be handed to me
on a silver platter of college funds and support—
as if I am not running from my upbringing
amid cockroaches, cowboy boots, and nighttime gunshots.

My best friend has to travel ten hours
and thirty-six minutes to see me.
He tells me that my plywood windows are my best-kept secret,
he tells me that it is sad that I am so ashamed.
This boy did not know that
I fashioned my Monopoly-money smile
after his dollar-sign grin.

I was raised in a broken neighborhood,
that even Southern folk won’t drive down
when riding in shiny, new cars.
I beat my accent out with books and Northern friends,
as if I could come from somewhere else
if I denied where I was for long enough.

No matter how many hours I devote
to saying “either” without the *e*,
soaking in crisp words doesn’t mean
that I am fixin’ to get my life together.
But it does mean that
I’m making the same bed every morning.