

Kenefic, OK

Meghan L. Dowling
Poetry

Gone before you could spit exhaust. The bus stopped in front of the RubyQ. Dropped the suitcase, scuffed a sneaker toe in the dirt. A pair of pickups and otherwise empty.

Forty-seven minutes later. Felt stupid and went into the diner. The woman behind the counter wasn't a 'Ruby'. According to the nametag she was an Alice. Ordered from her, sat down on the split vinyl stool. Fiddled with my coffee and felt stupid again.

All mouth-o's and big eyes. Three faces stayed just like that as the dollar-twenty hit the counter and the door swung shut.

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The two and three-quarters of a mile road was scrubby, brown, flat. Oklahoma was ugly. Twenty-four hours on a bus, and for what? Suitcase wheels bumped against dirt road. And flipped, dragged behind.

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Knew nothing about Oklahoma but that John Berryman left it for Florida. Before a father shot himself outside the window in 1926. At one point, Berryman wrote: *Cedars and the westward sun./The darkening sky. A man alone/Watches beside the fallen wall/The evening multitudes of sin/Crowd in upon us all...*

At another point, he threw himself off a bridge in Minnesota.

A girl left Kansas three years ago to follow a boy south.

Fifteen people were killed by a tornado in Abilene in 1967.

An elderly woman bought a dented can of peaches in an A&P just outside of Wichita yesterday afternoon.

There is a field in Nebraska where prairie becomes plain. Burnt sienna and pancake, south and flatter still. Land made for migration.

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The red mailbox, leaning into a brush pile. Dented, coated with rust. S-M-I-T-H in flaking letters. Gravel crunches, step by step by step. To the heap of wood masquerading as house. A door, heavy, already open. Inside is cavernous, dark.

One foot on the rotting porch and one on the sill and called into its depths.

One foot on the sill and one on a threadbare carpet.

Moving further into the unknown boundaries of a room, careful, hesitating steps. Confusion in an open mouth. The possibility of light outlined in a door.

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Dishwater sky through filmy panes in an unkempt kitchen. A hunk of stove, dented metal of indeterminate color. Slabs of grease cake burners, knobs, rim the busted hood. A cast iron washstand, drain board, shards of porcelain. On the squared-legged table, atop the shredded vinyl: a teapot. Of all things—white, chipped, covered with painted bunches of violets.

Warm.

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Ritual. Staging cups. One hand in the delicate curve, another pressing the top lightly. Pouring hot. Steam. *Say something.* The cheap tablecloth peeling, cotton batting exposed. *Say something.* A sugar bowl swarmed by ants.

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Meanwhile.

To confirm something not quite remembered. To vouch for, prove it. To language authenticity.

There.

There are no sheaves of wheat

The grounds have fallen into disrepair.

Gray light filters, overrun with broadleaf. The sound of voices echoes off the rusted scythe, a lean-to on the cold hard ground.