

“Midday”
by Emily Trujillo

I’m lying in bed. There’s always a strange intermittent period between sleep and wake, and right now it takes me into its loose-skinned old lady palms with a soft familiarity. Orchestral and soft, my fan hums in the background.

My room is dark, a dense spiderwebby black that’s thick with possibility. The lace curtains cast warped faces on the walls; in the shadows beneath my closet door, tiny black eyes blink with a malicious laziness. If I were any younger than I am, I would be terrified of it.

A week ago, my older sister Rachel came back from college. She took me to the park and let my arms and legs burn in the midday sun. I drew with chalk and played hopscotch while she read in the shade. Sometimes I would look up and watch her as she sat peacefully. It felt strange to look at her silky brown hair and thin, fairylike face, knowing that she was my kin.

On the car ride home, Rachel told me stories of living at school up north. The sky above the town was always a nuanced shade of blue or grey, and the sound of cars played like a white noise track that followed you around all the time, even at night. The noise cocooned you, from wake to sleep and back again, so much that you didn’t even notice it was gone until you came back into the suburbs, where there was just nothing. It was always windy or snowy, but in a glamorous way, kind of. With older kids, I think cold weather is just another excuse to dress up.

At college, my sister said, going outdoors was like a cool, sleek gift.

I shift awake. There’s a tapping or padding noise in the distance, almost like footsteps.

I turn on my cell phone flashlight and walk over to the window. A dizzy feeling overtakes me as I get up. I hadn’t realized how I was tired until now.

When I pull back the curtains I see that an insect has been trapped between the windowglass and the mesh screen. It moves frantically, haphazardly, its wings buzzing like little helicopter wings. Its black body jitters against the glass, and then the mesh, and then the glass again. It moves with an eerie urgency, switching again and again between two unyielding surfaces.

I want to ask it, “Don’t you ever get tired, fighting a losing battle?” But my parents are asleep and if I say anything I might wake them up.

Spooked, I return to bed.

In my dreams I see Rachel again. She’s lying in the park with her head on the grass, wearing a pink chiffon party dress. Her long, slender limbs disappear into the folds of the fabric; her hair is arranged in a messy ring around her face. She looks up at me lazily, her pale eyes half-closed. In real life, she’s at college studying, but here she looks at me cunningly. Her long, straight nose casts a curved shadow on her face.

I say, “Don’t you think you’ll get bug bites?”

“Stupid,” she sighs. “Is that what you’re thinking of now? The sky is so beautiful today.”

I look up and she's right: The clouds have massed and darkened above us. They seethe, black upon black upon a black so dark that it makes my head light.

I ask, "Is this what it looks like at your other house? When you're away?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

Bugs – fat, shiny beetles, cockroaches, houseflies – crawl from the ground. Their hard-shelled bodies click as they touch one another. I sit and watch as they crawl over me.

"I wish you would come back," I say. "I miss you."

My sister smiles amusedly. We're sitting in the minivan, Mom and me and everyone, and we're dropping her off at campus but I'm not allowed to get out of the car and bother her.

"Goodbye," she says. "I'll see you later."

When I wake up in the morning, it's raining outside. My raw, pinkening skin hurts as I move. I get up slowly and go through my morning routine lethargically. The wet casts a ghostly grey fog through the curtains.

I pull back the blinds to look out onto my street. It's dark; nobody is out on the road or in their driveways yet. The sky is a muddy blue. I see a faint yellow light in the windows of one of the houses on my street, but I can't remember the names of the neighbors who live there.

A bug lies in the space between the mesh screen and the windowglass – a wasp, with a rich, amber-colored body. Its arms and abdomen are curled forward, like it's shielding itself from something. I think of Medusa, the serpent woman, whose gaze turned onlookers to stone, and I see her looking through my window, at an insect padding futilely for escape.

The wasp must have been dead for hours. Its body is chalky with death.