

Taken from “ADULT SUPERSTORE”

Lightning strikes ahead of us as we head down I-40. The neon lights of a strip mall blur past my window as we pass through Crossville. Loading the U-Haul took all day. The billboards are lit in the darkness: “DO YOU SUFFER FROM LUST? JESUS SAVES.” “ADULT SUPERSTORE. INTIMACY. MEN AND WOMEN. EXIT NOW.” “IT’S NOT JUST YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE. SUPPORT THE UNBORN.” I left Tennessee once and I don’t think I ever will again. My body will not let me; my heart is a magnet stuck to the refrigerator of this state. The lightning strikes again, pointed and cartoonish. I imagine it hits me. I imagine I die.

I make a list in my notes app of things I never have to do. I never have to sit through a kindergarten graduation. I never have to wait three hours in line at an amusement park to ride a rollercoaster. I never have to take a toddler through a short layover at the Atlanta airport.

I have goosebumps and a small plant in my lap. It’s grown with me. I water it maybe once every three weeks and it thanks me by not dying. I put it near the sunlight a couple weeks ago and the leaves yellowed. I learned my lesson. I moved it back to the shade.

The threat of taking my medication on time looms over me. The alert on my phone goes off; thirty minutes later, it makes a voluminous beeping sound to remind me that this medication is critical. Not voluntary. As if I would ever choose this. But in a way, I did. I chose to seek help. I chose to be saved. This is not how I imagined salvation.

I am angry that I am in charge of myself. The lightning storm illuminates the two-lane highway. The clouds have not cracked and ushered the rain in yet, but I can smell it coming. It smells like mildew and rot. Petrichor repulses me. My right hand hovers over the door handle. I could push on it right now, tumble out, maybe survive.

I wonder if I am putting my degree to use. I’m writing again. I’ve made it this far; at least now I have something to show for it. When I tell people I am a writer, I say it like a promise. *Check back in a couple years. My name will be on the shelf.* I watch people around me achieve their goals: get published in magazines, work with professional agents and editors. I curse myself for my setbacks—the hospitalizations, the episodes—but I ease up just as fast. What else would I write about? I am this. I was always going to be this.