

Vanishing Point

by *Stephanie Johnson*

She promised not to think about Ray, but when the station wagon hit the deer, she heard his voice instead of her own. Ray, who always has advice whether she asks for it or not, telling her people do more damage when they swerve to avoid wildlife than when they charge ahead. It's her shit luck to have doubled-down, to swerve and hit the deer. Her car is another dying animal, bleeding fluids everywhere.

She's stuck in the station, staring at the vending machine, thinking about Ray: Ray planning a garden for her and the babies to enjoy, Ray not complaining when she burns his dinner, Ray saying she can figure things out—she just needs a little time. Ray who has needs that she needs to fulfill, her mama reminds her, before he finds someone else who can. Never mind that she's exhausted. Who isn't? Her mama thinks she complains too much—While the mechanic punches up parts and labor, she watches his dirty fingernails, his thick knuckles. When he says it'll take three days to get parts, that she's stuck in wherever-the-hell-she-is for the weekend, she starts to cry.

His filthy hand touches her wrist. He's seen the haphazardly packed bags in the backseat. He's seen her dirty sweatshirt and greasy hair. He's probably seen plenty of people like her with no idea where they're going. She could tell him she has a rotten husband, say she's running for her life. She could lie. Only she knows the truth. Only momentum matters.

My cousin runs the motor inn across town, he says. Tell him I sent you, that you need a quiet room. Call your people and tell them where you're calling from.

Oil fills her nostrils like sickness. Ray's

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mama will say she's run off with another man. Hers will claim she always knew her daughter was selfish. Only Ray will defend her. She knows what he'll say, once he's gotten the twins from his mother's and waited and waited for her to come home. Go on, he'll say when he finally tries to sleep. Find yourself.

Distance is a matter of perspective. Together, they are disappearing, foreshortened, converging.

I can't see anything alone anymore, she says when she calls.

I know, he answers, I can't either.

This is what it means to be home. You walk together through the garden turning green in fragile spring sun. In this way, the matter is decided: step after step, you discover the way things work.

Night in Philadelphia

by *Carrie Murphy*

Night in Philadelphia, two dogs fucking fast in an alley under a lilac arbor.

Somewhere else a man, working late, opens a window to let in the exhaust.

Somewhere further, a fish is closing its small sad eyes, floating to the top.

And even farther, yellow balls hitting against a brick wall in the sun.

Halfway across the wide world a child learns A. A is a letter, A is a word.

The red penis of the dog slinks back into his body. The child squints.

Everything squeaking.
Everything silent.

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DIGEST

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