

REQUITED

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by Kristina Marie Darling
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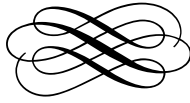
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*"The sky we bear on our shoulders, heaven-height
and livid firmament, delineated dream
sounding distance, when distant spaces seem
silence, absence, unconsummated sight..."*

*—Karen Volkman, *Nomina**



*

We walk to a rose garden in the dead of winter. You're sorry for "needing time." There are always so many things that can go wrong in a conversation. Above us, fallen branches cover the fountains. A car pulls off the road. You ask for directions, but the driver has already turned away.

*

Around us, dead ivy sprawls from a display of marble cherubs.
You kick some leaves with the steel toe of your boot. How did we
get lost when the garden seemed so small. On every statue,
plaster doves have cracked from the cold. Their colorless eyes ask
why we're still here.

*

The way out of the garden is simple. I let go of your hand and climb over a chain link fence. Traffic rushing on the other side of a steel partition. What does it mean to cross a threshold. Near the road, an injured deer has been left to die. Its dark brown eyes seem to wonder why we've left the roses behind.

*

Now we're driving to your sister's house. You apologize for the flowers, their iced-over stems. I watch your breath turn to frost as it touches the window. If I left for another unremarkable city, would the air between us begin to thaw. You gesture at the freeway, its marble façade covered in salt.

*

Tonight you tell me about girls from Midwestern cities. The subtle difference between Ann Arbor and Bloomington. I wrap your scarf around my neck. When did conversations become difficult. In the distance, strip malls have begun to glow. At the end of your story is another small town.

*

Browsing shop windows we're never alone. Your friend buys discounted chocolate as clerks dismantle holiday wreaths. Where would we go if you were willing to follow me. Around us, strangers admire the display of lights. A pill dropped in cold water loses some of its bitter taste.