

His Stories are Killing Him

Middle of the night
he wakes up, a row of red marks
burning his arm, marks shaped like teeth.

His hair is falling out—
he's too young for that.
Sometimes a scream wakes him up.
Antelopes gallop through his chest.

He tries locking all the windows,
tries drinking two whiskeys and turning around,
eyes closed, while dialing the number
of a girl he knows—

but her machine whispers syllables
of loneliness that do not help. Nothing helps.
His stories say *I told you so*.

Three a.m. the smoke detector screeches him upright
a flame crawls up his curtains
and from within the closet something knocks
screaming *let me out let me out!*

His keys hide under the rug, behind
the broom, under the mattress
whispering *I told you so, I told you so*.
He moves away, leaves no forwarding address.

Presses his shadow into a room
above the dry cleaner's, rests his forehead
against the pane. No curtains this time, just
that steamy film, the smell of chemical solvents.

What will his new story be?
He goes out, looking for air and inspiration
but even the sky seems scarred, scratched-out, opaque.

Tonight his stories park across the street,
smoking and drinking coffee in paper cups,
watching his door, dialing his phone,
hanging up.

You've got the wrong man!
he tries to tell them, but he himself
can't remember who he really is
and now something's thumping up the stairs

toward him.

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Juror's Choice Award #1