

Gianna Russo

Two Houses Down

Five quick blasts and the neighbors'
REM is quartered and drawn up under a pillow,
the horn a Morse Code to the streetlight then somebody
leans forever on the steering wheel, a siren call
to the dead hours and whatever the hell those people
are doing now there's a voice, Billie Holiday-sleepy, opiate-toned,
drawn out in a crack-stung laugh stuck in a story
a woman is telling, there was a corner,
a bus stop, a bar no, no it's starlight clear and sluggish
not a laugh, but a sob, she's sobbing, but rageful
pissed off, honking her horn, sitting there in the front
seat in the front yard, with her fury blasting over
the flower beds and her accusations slashing at the porch where
the low panic of a man pleads *calmdown, calmdown*, but
she won't touch that because *How could you* and the horn
blasts and blasts firehouse red with the neighbors all awake as
the cop car turns the corner, lights off, jacklight searching for house numbers
as the patrolman slows and stares across the azaleas, holding
uppermost in his mind two cops, just like his brothers, shot
in cold blood three months ago for a speeding ticket, less
than what this likely is, and another one murdered a year ago
just blocks from here by some nut pushing a grocery cart
with a rifle shoved under his shit, so as he passes my house, where
I'm standing on the dark front porch in my nightgown, just ear-gawking
at this mess and I point down to where it's coming from, he parks the car
away from that house, and walks with purpose but gingerly,
too, up toward the yard, calling before him, *What's up, bro?* and then

the man says, *My girlfriend's flipped out, she's all yours*, and I imagine the man
halfway backs in through the front door, because the unfairness
she's holding in her gut has turned to weeping, and the cop is talking
low and firm, helping her from the car, I think, while she weeps like a 30's starlet,
all the yelling drained out so that a muffled, moony whimper
is all that's left in the sober embarrassed knowing inside
the houses on our street which have all kept their darkness on, not one light
to put love's violence in the line-up our disapproval,
but next morning as we drive to work we see their two rocking chairs
upside down in the dirt, stuck where they landed thrown from the porch,
their curved rails sticking face up like a pair of worn scythes.