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It looks different on overcast mornings. The foreboding is more typical, more classic. I wait for my oatmeal to beep in the microwave and look out the windows in our kitchen door at the sterilized sky. The three receding electrical poles are crosses, swimming into the gray.

The poles are not in full view, ask questions, are questionable themselves, disappear, are cut off by the cinderblock backside of the Bodega Latina and the heavy black line of its roof. Rows of mourning doves coo sadly at our grass, motionless and glassy with frost or dew or fallen rain. I don't wear socks on the moist morning bare floor. My oatmeal and I grow cold and lumpy with dread.

It is amphibious. When the rains come a' pourin' down, they a' gather themselves all up in the holes in the lawn, slick the rails and the porch, the bluish granite stones between the belly-high fence and the Bodega. They patter and they pool up on the metal roof of the shed guarding the dirt floor. I can see through the opening. We'll worry about the lawnmower blades in the spring. Sometimes the grill lives in there, shielded from the falling water, other times it fills, is transformed into a receptacle for cigarette butts and trash we think will burn well. The tree that sits next to the house, hangs over Spencer's bedroom, is bare in the winter. It crawls, claws its way up and over the wires that run along the fence. A creeper tangles itself, strangling the power line that reaches through the stark branches to our humming and clinking and unh-unh-UNHing house.

And in the summer, when them rains be all stopped up, the yard was always full of Ryan and shuttle runs and soccer balls and energy—one-man electron cloud, whirling magnetic field. Our faces left smears against the back windows. Or Dan sitting, just sitting, with his pillow on top of his bongos he swelled and throbbed with light and presence and the wind only could get through to him, the brown beads of picked-clean clover. The inchoate ululations of air conditioners and tension wires pierced and occupied the heavy water, the solemn absurdity in the air.

If I fumble down the stairs early enough—those days I can't bear to waste a minute of sleeping in the upstairs—into the dull, wet day, the crowded living room and dining room table plastered with sticks Dan brings back from the river, Clay's camping equipment, the books who take up enough space to have their names on the lease—if I get up early enough in the weary, wet morning, the wires that loop and slink over the landscape and on into the parking lots and neon and toxically beautiful sunsets that are not here now will be flood-lit up, bright white lines that twinkle in the sleeping mimosa looming above the chainlinks and the big oak in the corner of the neighbor's yard. The Check City's blocky black façade, its straight inside edges, illuminated and angular, throw back the pale sky, mirrored off of the filmed-over rubber roofing.

These are the mornings when the weirdness of life in America scares me back to the upstairs, to my wood-paneled cocoon, to where our

—Ben Brezner

expensive-in-so-many-ways heat rises, to swaddle myself and try to finish *Walden*. My oatmeal sits alone in the tinted world of the microwave until I need to warm up some pizza for supper.

What are the people next door doing right now? They are house-bound, I'm fairly certain (the white and maroon conversion van with a terminally flat tire that lounged like a bear in front of their house, soaking up the summer heat, got first a fluorescent orange sticker, and then a tow.) and speak only Portuguese, so I have not yet heard their names. These are the people with a clothesline, a superior tool shed filled with superior tools, neatly trimmed shrubs and ground ivy that crouch along the edges of their property. These are the people who I've never seen in their screened-in three-season room, who have built a white trellis arch over their back door. These are the people whose six-cubby-by-six-cubby shoe rack is filled with slippers and brown leather and sits next to their front door, on their wide front porch, carpeted with gleaming plastic putting green. Are they wearing any of this extraneous footwear right now? Are they reading American newspapers out loud to each other (the price of gas, the weather page)? Playing pinochle, rummy five hundred, a Brazilian game I don't know the rules of, go fish, solitaire? Do they eat peanut butter sandwiches? Are they lonely?

And at night in the summer we would lie on our backs and get high and wish there were stars. But now it's got cold and we only come out here to mill about the porch, smoking cigarettes with deep breaths and then go, huffing, back inside where it's warm enough to drink beer. But now I'm learning to come here by myself and feel the cold wood through the seat of my pants at one a.m. and how to fall in love with the burnished sky, rubbed smooth by a million vibrating lights and heating units.

And when the sun is out and it's clear, the neighborhood kids peek over pickets, stare through the gate we leave tantalizingly open. And we give them good reason to as we bounce and crack up on the squeaking new trampoline. We strew our lawn with our local alley's unwanted bowling pins, our cable-spool table with empty Rolling Rocks and grill tools. Cars lisp blissfully, listlessly by in the night; their headlights illuminate the transistors on top of the telephone poles in the same way they would if the poles were falling over and the cars staying still. What's there to be scared of, here in the back yard?