

EDWIN'S FRIDAY NIGHT

HOLLY PAINTER

1.

It's nearly 5 o'clock.

Charles and Toby will be here soon with the sandwiches and beer.
They always show up together.
30 years ago, we would have teased them
and wondered if their constant bickering
was just a cover-up for something else.
But Toby doesn't see so well these days.
Charles picks him up.

I've got the American Idol tape,
Tuesday and Wednesday both.
We always watch them back-to-back, marathon-style,
sometimes arguing or shushing each other when our favorites come on,
sometimes laughing at the ones with wretched voices or bizarre choreography,
sometimes sitting quietly.

We don't bother to fast-forward through
commercials or the recap segments.

No one wants Friday night to end early.

2.

It's hard all week not to find out what's happened.
I have to avoid certain sections of the paper
and try not to look at the billboard on Pico
where they cross out the hopeful faces as they go.

They're so young,
all of them under thirty,
just kids, really.

There's one who looks like Robert from certain angles
with his loose curls, long lashes, and faint moustache.
He wears tight jeans and shadowy pressed shirts.
When he dances, I feel shy and helpless and ashamed.
He's so young.

But so was Robert.

3.

Robert, Robert.

He had eyelashes so long
that even when he squeezed his eyes completely shut
the tips of the lashes still poked out.
And I'd twist his hair up in my fingers, gasping
while he laughed at the undignified spasms
I never learned to control.

Robert would have laughed at this, too:
the three of us sitting here Friday nights with
this teenybopper television rubbish
and the boy with the long eyelashes
though not quite as long as his own.

He'll be crossed out soon too, just like all the rest
and Friday night will be just Toby, Charles, and me again.

4.

Robert would laugh, but Robert never had to get old.
It was the only prospect he hated more than dying.
“We’re too beautiful for age spots and cardigans,” he said.
And we were. We were all beautiful then.
But I don’t miss my young body.
I only miss him.

And it’s selfish, I know, but I’d rather have him here,
old and dying slowly, just a year at a time
watching young men shimmy and shake on these shows
and dropping off, one this week, and one the next.

THE NEW NEIGHBORHOOD

HOLLY PAINTER

Chain link shadow cats, night cawing roosters
pale mournful babies of quiet Latino ladies
wild dogs dragging piñatas down sidewalks
ghettobirds dip diving, bellies full of cops

Roadside fire sale: Happy Meal plastic gadgets
Catholic school polo three cousins worn
Bedsheets wreathed together by rain and dust
shopping cart, my own shopping cart, mine

Mechanics' shoes scuff pews unstuffed on the
front lawn at Friendship Primitive Baptist Church
An ice cream truck squeaks La Cucaracha and
it's Tamale! Tamale! Tamale! every morning

Musica norteña wake up, mulitas on the breeze
The blurry-dull sun leaks and you find
your Spanish dubbed out of sync like
everything else you think you remember