

Interstate Exit 675: Thanksgiving

The freeway along the line where Oregon turns into California looks different this year. Things change. I know. But I don't remember the trees shouting this orange, or how the evergreens hug their blazing neighbors like they know the flames won't last. I know that time turns in circles, so why am I constantly reminding myself not to claw my fingernails against the edge of it? Walking down my building's halls at night, I let my right-hand touch lightly to the texture purposefully painted onto their walls. My fingers love this; the contact. I wrote recently that I want someone to hold me the way a body hits the surface of moving water. I feel the need to state this again. My cousin says she cried when she read the last piece I sent her; while in a dimly lit, yellow-hued, hotel stairwell, I had the most honest conversation I've had all year. She was wearing my coat and I was pretending not to shiver. An hour before, she made me laugh until my lungs tapped out when she ran from the security guard walking his rounds. She bolted, our joint still lit in my hand. He passed without a word; her 21-year-old face sheepish when he nodded to her standing 15 feet away. My face was already splitting, sitting on the second of three concrete steps below a sign that read "warning snakes", its red edges warped and waning. She says she's not good in a crisis, but I'd argue she's worse when there isn't one. We've both gotten used to toeing that line. We'll keep coming back though, and not because of the turning trees or even because her father shared his parents with my mother, but because looking out over the steep and rocky drop-off behind the hotel, I see my mother driving her beat-up high school car down the highway over the river. She probably had long hair and I can't put my finger on why the image of sunglasses shoved on the bridge of her nose and the orange glow bouncing off the ripples of the river is the only way I can imagine her here. Maybe it's because it's the only way I can imagine myself here. It's a snapshot that I'm not even sure existed, of 1981, and dark chestnut hair, and I think a dream of leaving town. That's what I feel every late November behind the freeway-sidelined hotel; I feel the desire to leave. It brims the bottom of my stomach in a familiar way. It isn't desperate or urgent. Actually, it makes me seep deeper into my seat, the same way I imagine my mother's right foot pressing into the gas pedal as she left for college. Hands at ten and two, sunglasses and a sunset.