

*Minutes*

by Joelle Garant

If it hadn't been for a spared tree that reached above the rest, we could've easily waved from roof to roof. There was nothing practical about the idea, really. The distance was still too vast to be spanned by words. I only liked to picture you on the other side: I was here or I was there, you were there even when you weren't.

Most days, I'd leave my apartment and walk three minutes from my life into yours, two streets west and back. Below, I faithfully went down the laneway and through the school yard. The tree was just a tree. It was instant, the way you doubled and split me in two. Somehow I had never felt more myself.

I spent years on that road, wishing you knew those minutes the way I did.

How when I wore skirts on warm days I walked faster, so the sullen men who gathered in the side yard wouldn't call out. On quiet mornings, while they rested, I counted how much of my abandoned furniture was now theirs, and I cheered for the rose-patterned armchair that joined their circle of broken seats. How when you cut off all my hair they stopped calling, but my steps never slowed.

How the laneway bungalow opposite their yard sparkled white in the sun, not because the color was bright but simply because there was glitter in the paint.

How late at night, the great hedge bordering the sidewalk loomed over, threatening to trap me in a deep sleep. Those nights, I walked in the middle of the road. How I found comfort in the slate stone that scaled the third house from the corner, honest and plain.

You spent that summer telling people I'd never meet that I was a furniture designer. I was a student then still, with dreams I whispered only as secrets. Often, now, I think about how this version of me already exists, how you realized her in the minds of many strangers. An answer you offered so casually it was taken as fact and stored in the forgotten, where it can stay true until it truly is — "What does your girlfriend do?"

Sometimes on our walks to farther places you'd ask for my ideas. I shaped elusive lamps and cabinets with waving hands. I furnished entire city blocks with the objects that filled my head and you followed me with curiosity, as though it was possible to share what I imagined. I wondered if the sullen men could see these pieces through their heavy eyes, maybe they would collect them for me in the side yard.

On that last three minute walk I stood still under the hot sun and begged the hedge to swallow me whole. I imagined myself watering it until it grew onto the road and over the house of men. I wanted to watch its roots crawl three minutes west and three minutes back. I asked the hedge to let me in so I could live my life in the middle, never here without you there. I would cover its branches in glitter so it could shine with the bungalow. I'd build a workshop inside, and I'd pick the stones off the honest house one by one to pave its floor. At night, my lamps would glow through the dense shrub to look after other girls on their walks home. I would build chairs with the wood of the tree that reached above the rest, and I'd invite these girls inside to sit. I would ask them about the first time they fell in love.