

Jenny Severyn
Figment

THE OVEN CLOCK ROLLS OVER TO 3:24PM, and Silas officially turns twenty-six. He abandons his breakfast skillet to soak with last night's dinner plates and wonders why he's thinking of Margot. He lifts his hands to pantomime taking a photo of the piled sink. This one he'd title *Filthy Man Takes Up Fly Breeding*. Or maybe *Domestic Detritus*. No, that's a better title for a series: black-and-white close-ups of the crusty gas range, the teetering bucket of unrecycled plastics by the back door, the hall closet's box of assorted screws and depleted batteries.

Collapsed on the living room futon, he imagines a self-portrait captured from above: his colorless likeness, framed by the busted ceiling fan's dust-laden blades and glazed by Floridian humidity. He angles an arm overhead and parts his lips in faux seduction. Sexy. Kait must like it, anyway. Silas rolls onto his side, poses like a Regency lady on a fainting sofa, and pictures Margot squatting between the thrifted coffee table and TV stand, DSLR camera in hand. Why is he thinking of her? She hasn't breached his surface in two years. Yet somehow, it doesn't feel sudden. Like she's lingered in the background out-of-focus, waiting for his attention.

That sounds theatrical. He knows he's prone to theatrics.

Beyond the TV, his guitar roosts in the corner. Silas tries to envision the melody that knocked around his head last night as he fell asleep. He considers futzing with the strings, attempting to reassemble the forgotten chorus into new material. His EP has hardly sold a copy for months, and the dive patrons surely weary of hearing the same songs week after week. Maybe he should pick an artist to cover. People prefer the songs they already know. The songs they can mumble together in cocktailed cozy stupor. Unthinking songs, familiar songs that swaddle their hips like a cooing mother while they sway. As much as he relishes the joy of creation, Silas doesn't mind playing covers. Minds neither the easy atmosphere they breed in dimness nor the way his voice filters into people's memories, palpating, regenerative, like a healer's hands.

The last time Margot appeared was when he'd limped the thousand miles to Ohio in his failing beater for Drew and Ashley's wedding. He was cheerfully single then, pre-Kait. He played in a nigh-passable folk-rock fusion band, earning free beer and wings in grimy bars. Coasting through what he assumed to be the obligatorily grungy early days of a tepid yet satisfying local music career. Silas didn't have grand aspirations. Grand aspirations were as drably predictable as Drew and Ashley's Mason jar and eucalyptus shindig in a shitty barn.

By the pasture fence, Silas, Drew, and the other guys tried cigars, the smell (and thereby taste) tainted by a horse manure tang. Silas asked Drew about Margot. Drew said, "Who?"

"From school," Silas said. "Honors classes. Photographer."

"I think I remember," Drew said, but then he moved on to bullshitting with Jory like they'd never finished sophomore year. Silas twirled the cigar. Watched ash float into the weeds.

Wilderness House Literary Review 19/4

Later he caught Ashley, breathless and giddy from dancing as she rehydrated with white zinfandel.

"I haven't seen Margot since graduation," Ashley said. "We weren't friends. I didn't think you were, either. Why're you asking?"

Now Silas wonders if he should have bought a cigar for his birthday. The crawlspace lattice is soaked from a pop-up shower, and the earth is warm and wet. Kait's shirt will be grease-stiff when her shift ends. She'll smell like canola oil, faded apple blossom deodorant, natural musk: better smells to enhance the cigar experience, Silas figures. He doesn't really know about cigars or their experience, but he likes the sentiment. He and Kait would push together on the futon, smoking and laughing, and phantom Margot would snap their photo, and he'd tell Margot to call it *Stupid Happy Dweebs*, although she'd want to call it something sweeter because she was sweet.

On the coffee table, Silas's cell phone jangles with a text from Kait. *Official happy birthday! Love you, goober. See you later.* Silas starts typing a coy response—*You missed it by X minutes*—but he notices his cell phone reads 3:24. He looks at the oven clock heralding 3:30, living six minutes in the future. He'd forgotten it was fast.