

Strange Towns

By Jennifer Brown

My sister came home from the bar and asked me to wash her hair. I was in the bath and she put her head over the side of the tub. Then she went to bed with it all wet in a tangled mess. I don't know where she slept. Her boyfriend was in bed with another woman. But the girl was a friend and they were asleep, curled away from each other on the mattress. Maybe they got tired of waiting up for her. I can imagine who she was out visiting; an ex who always seemed to know what city she was in. And my sister said—"Is it wrong, to be sad when you see your boyfriend in bed with someone else?" "No," I said. It was a girl they drank beer and rode bikes with. (How can people have such *normal* lives, I thought to myself). She— this normal girl— all golden hair and smiles, had helped me break in a pair of pointe shoes on a doorframe in Silver Lake on a warm fall evening. That night I said I wanted to stay inside, while everyone was out on the patio talking and laughing; I don't know why. The music made me feel a certain way. When my sister was closing the door I said, "Leave it open so I'm not separated from you." She rolled her eyes and floated away, drink in hand. The walls were green and the room seemed lopsided. There was the air conditioner whirring in the window frame. Christmas lights were strung up on the hill, palm trees silhouetted against the hazy Los Angeles skyline that seemed to drop off into nothing. I could never understand her for that; for living in such a strange town, where it's hard to tell what happened in the past, where people disappear, walking in silence under the burning sun and violet clouds.