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## The Insomniac

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D. J. SMITH

## THE INSOMNIAC

Your eyes unstick to morning sparking  
in the sycamores, scattering the swallows that clot there  
at dusk.

*Tell me I can do this, today if I need to. Tell me.* Half  
dreamed,

as just before sleep,  
that tin-canned echo falls through your head, sudden  
as a match tossed in the dark—and sometimes a kind of  
vision before you

like a pattern  
of gnats with the brilliance of sun-shafts on water.

A thick pot of coffee  
and you can see  
that student in the back, the red-headed one with the  
skin of flecked-

muslin and the soft-mouthed drawl  
of slow-motioned answers he hopes to polish and keep.

You can almost recall  
a life as simple. Years ago, you watched from the office  
window

a fine rain blowing,  
the first leaves of the season waking to wind,  
and she called, long-distance,  
to say the tests had come back: her, *Come soon*,  
smoked and brittle on the line. Remember after.

That singular calm. Stars  
creeping out onto puddles to sleep. And you  
at an upstairs window, looking down, taking your first  
instructions from the dead.

*for DeWayne*