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## Offstage—The Killing of Ruth Collins by Russell Lee

Joshua Young

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## OFFSTAGE—THE KILLING OF RUTH COLLINS BY RUSSELL LEE

there are crimes and there are crimes of passion. if someone found him right afterwards, he'd probably say

it was neither, but a necessity born out of shame.

today, he'd tell you otherwise, and he tries to scrape it from his past like bark from a tree, but it's tied to his ribcage and only tightens when he tries to free it.

the night it went down, he entered through the back put a burlap bag over his head and stood over the bed—once theirs—and used a pillow to muffle the shots.

instead of shooting, he used the pillow to snuff her out.

took three hours of sitting inside his car, three blocks down, across the ball park, loading and unloading shells into the chamber of his pistol. walking through how it would go.

when it was over, he remembered

how she'd lay herself on their living room floor, fold her arms across her chest and say,

"this is what i'd look like in a casket..."

and

"am i still pretty when i'm dead?"

people fall in love in the key of c and out of it with dissonance,

climbing its way into a scale.

that night, he made her bed, cleaned the house, and carried her from the house to his car, and left her body a mile from the quarry in the place kids call the ghost woods.

he tells bartenders about his dreams, the ones starting afterwards, about kasey always clicking the chamber of his pistol and saying,

"what i do and what i should are like brothers."

• • •

her name was number 20 on the list, today the sheriff's found parts of her body under a stump. one of the deputies says, "who's that?" the sheriff straightens up and pulls the list from his shirt pocket. he unfolds it and reads her name and though he's never read it before.

sometimes, songs begin, almost like this: