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Clarity

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CLARITY
Youngstown, Ohio

“You know the one about your father
and Channel 33?” I’m nineteen, I shake my head. “Okay,
so thirty years ago, VCR’s got big
and adult videos came out. We got the A/B switches—
you’ve seen them in the rooms—B for cable and A for the porn
that loops every couple of hours. The hotel
up the road got them—it’s business,
what can you do? All right—
so 33 comes into the office
and says they want to do an interview. It was just a reporter,
a cameraman, and your father.” My uncle focuses
as if he’s reciting a prayer
to the key rack. The phone rings. He writes a name
on a scrap of paper, jabs it
through a key hook, hangs up
and says “So the reporter asks your father,
‘Do you get complaints about the videos?’
Your father rubs his beard—
he’s nervous—looks into the camera
and says, ‘Yes—sometimes
customers call the office
and complain that the picture
isn’t clear enough.’”