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## What Isn't Dead

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FREESIA MCKEE

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## WHAT ISN'T DEAD

- Winner: Patricia Goedicke Prize in Poetry -

I don't remember the favor,  
if she was carrying my bag or helping  
me put on my coat or pointing out  
a tall step, my ex-  
girlfriend, the gentleman,  
the one who told me at the final  
break that she wished we had  
never met

at the gay bar, in what felt like the loneliest  
place, with the same broken friends every week, under  
the glow of the sober dyke DJ who said someday  
she'd be famous, carrying out the same night  
over and over for the same broken friends  
who said someday they'd go back  
to school, someday they'd get married to a really fine girl,  
introducing the bar to their third fiancée, the same bottle  
thrown over the back fence from the strip club's  
parking lot, broken, wished we had never gone on

to meet over beers the two curious women  
who decided we were not  
interesting enough for their company, not  
exotic enough, not queer  
enough, we were young and old and already shacked

up, stable jobs and bored out of my mind, my ex-  
girlfriend who wished we'd never  
gone up north to spend time on the 4th  
with her family in their flag shirts, the neighbor  
on the lawn singing *God Bless*  
*America* into a karaoke microphone  
like a cantor. No, I don't remember the favor, before  
my very own *Stone Butch Blues*,  
her sister screaming in the living  
room over a mysterious rivalry, I don't remember,  
with all we had been through as I ran away  
from my life by staying in place on that night near

the end, of what gentlemanly act she had partaken,  
I really don't remember, on the dark  
Seattle street, the reptilian glow  
of the food store behind us, what tender favor  
she towered over to help me with  
when the anonymous figure yelled  
across the street, cheering her on,  
low and emphatic, the inadequate statement, "*chivalry is not dead!*"