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**"after café wha? and the gaslight," "Queridos" and "Self-Check-Out"
(poems)**

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after café wha? and the gaslight

Elizabeth Theriot

Ryan Chighizola Memorial Scholarship Winner

chords pull a leashed alphabet through the bar,
a half-hour tourniquet that binds verses
for another shuffled neon tribe;
all grey, and the red eyes blinking.
he never planned to stay anyway,
not in this hole of patronizing brows and ugly light
ugly ice-cold heart attacks

(then)

odes at the foot of an iron hospice bed,
the first father's calloused hand blesses
the new first son newly crowned prophet

"this machine kills fascists" his guitar read,
and "careful what you wish for, boy" he might have said.

(meanwhile)

1. a generation swallowed dry by rhythmic lamentations
2. the whip-lash howl of social dissention
3. scorn shaded blue

and it was only 1962.

(like hell he'd be crucified for self-appointed wise men cant sell tickets if you're dead
cant sell vinyl nothing's final in this city but the

gutter

Queridos

Elizabeth Theriot

Ryan Chighizola Memorial Scholarship Winner

After eleven it is hard to tell
who is more tired—I, or the night itself.
Both of us sink to fill spaces forgotten in daylight,
both of us melt and sigh.

The candle flame dances to a heater's hum
and the maraca footfalls outside my door:
fiesta, siesta, I cannot speak Spanish
but lying in warm sheets I hear the language,
spoken by someone I have yet to meet.

Midnight
and outside looks thick as clay
but nowhere near as pliable.
Somewhere a sculptor's arthritic hands creak
and I breathe to the imagined sound of it
in the trees, and my bones, and the settling night.

Self-Check-Out

Elizabeth Theriot

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In the fall I'd make unnecessary rounds
over scuffed, speckled tile
in case you were ~~namelessly~~ there-
an anonymous book browser, a stranger buying milk.

Watching life at noon, seven, dusky three,
I saw the protruding stomachs
pregnant with hamburger-death
stretching filthy shirts and wide-eyed navel

(Cyclops, do you still blame Nobody?)

and the young man's leg,
tendons swimming a
synchronized stroke
delicately in cream smooth skin
under the fluorescents hairless and illuminated.

(But I am relieved you're keeping busy
discharged from the squealing basket wheeled
nail-biting purple eye socket army
of sleepless bags, potato chip bags, plastic bags of groceries)