

## SHANNON FARRELL

### The Mourning After

Laughing voices make way to crowded  
harmony,  
wane to underwater drone, then  
fade to black.

Light  
stabs at eyelids, forcing them to retreat  
In races equal parts light and confusion  
I stop breathing, to feel the place where  
am I  
In bed (thoughts shout too loudly for this  
time of day  
at this revelation)  
balled in stringy, green blanket,  
naked,  
if not for the checkerboard pattern,  
etched by the blanket threads  
stuck with sweat to my skin.  
My skin, in my green blanket, in  
(confusion dissipates)  
my bed, in my room, and everything  
(confusion reamasses)  
drenched in smell that is  
not mine.

Rolling out of green blanket,  
hit the floor stumbling,  
through the door, to the shower.  
(tripping on tangled sheet trailed across the  
doorway)  
The first steps wake unfamiliar stabs of  
soreness  
starting somewhere inside and slithering  
upwards into stomach  
where waves of anxiety pretend to be  
something else  
and for the moment, I am fooled.

Forty minutes worth of hot water  
can't clear the lingering smell  
of someone else  
but clears my thoughts enough to wonder  
why everything seems  
awry

and the sharp ache inside me  
throbs a persistent reminder not to forget  
something  
I can't remember  
but might have something to do with the  
bruises  
that are developing in the hot water  
on each arm.

Returning to room,  
I am careful not to trip on strewn sheets  
(some clothes, too).  
Talking out loud to myself, I think  
somehow that will provoke clear thinking.  
It makes me think, "Maybe I am crazy," and  
I laugh out loud  
jarringly enough that the confusion retreats  
to reveal the outlines of memory,  
Single frames,  
bits of film on a cutting room floor.

Reassembly comes slowly but surely;  
pieces are missing  
("But it's okay," I think, because usually  
you can still see the general picture)  
so I step back  
to take a look.

Knees buckle and body falls into a crumpled  
pile  
next to the strewn sheets and clothes.  
Eyes remain focused on the picture  
finally assembled.  
I close them but the picture looms  
and I can again feel the weight of his arms  
bearing down  
where the bruises appeared.

*Shannon Farrell lives in California.*