

Ghostly Meeting

by D.A. Gray

Texas winter approaches never quite reaches
freezing. I'm watching moths from my screen porch
circle a stark-naked light bulb;
I'm watching shadows who weren't here
before nightfall dance in its perimeter.

There's a drumming against the screen,
bodies drawn to what wasn't seen once.
My pulse quickens, blind in ways
where I wasn't blind before.

Once you and I stood in this space when
it was nothing but concrete and air,
nothing but to listen as the neighbor cat
slunk under the fence. We laughed easily then.

Now there are only faint echoes of laughter's ghosts.

It surprises me when it hits. I'm out here
chain-smoking on a half-lit porch waiting
for some one who will never show.

There's a phrase in my head, or maybe it's a poem,
something on the ghosts of laughter. I say it
out loud to hear it, so the words that crystallize
in the thin air will keep me company

this hour when the neighbor cat darts
beneath the fence, when the owl burst
through tree limbs and an almost full
moon rises above the live oak branches

that have become claws in its light.

The words turn ghostly white in the coldening
air. They are evidence of life.

Last time I stood this long in the half light

I'd just gotten the word you had died –
your heart weakened by pills and booze
you had used to pack your wounds.

Even today I say you succumbed to the wounds
a decade after they happened.

Tonight I remembered & went
for a run in the dark, enough moonlight to see the edge
of the road. I wanted to hear the things
I could never hear in daylight.

Tonight there was just the snapback of branches,
from the life darting away from the road,
a cold breeze, my own cough,
the no one I'm not waiting on
is never going to show.

Tonight, I laugh just to watch my self
materialize and watch me – just like
everything else – keep drifting away.

D.A. Gray is the author of *Contested Terrain* and *Overwatch*. His poems have appeared in *The Sewanee Review*, *Appalachian Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Still: The Journal*, *Collateral Journal*, *War, Literature & the Arts* and *Wrath-Bearing Tree* among others. He holds Masters Degrees from The Sewanee School of Letters and Texas A&M-Central Texas. Gray now teaches, writes, and lives in Central Texas.