

## Summertime II

Grace Shelton

Sunlight flashes in between the trees as you speed down the highway. You can see slices of a river to your left every now and then, like punctuation in a never-ending poem. Burnt orange against cobalt blue, harsh yellow fading into gentle purple. Ahead, the road stretches infinitely. It is not yet late enough for morning rush hour; the earth is silent save for the music you blast through the speakers. Your fingers burn against the leather of the steering wheel.

Turn to your right, and Summertime is there in the passenger seat with his sunglasses perched on his forehead. He does not look like you remember him, but perhaps that is better. His lips are not blue; his clothing is not wet. Each little curl of his hair falls neatly around his face instead of plastering to his cheeks. He is the boy of tropical sun that you'd almost forgotten, the boy from the photographs in the boxes you destroyed when you first returned home.

He says, "I wish it could be like this forever." His voice is like honey straight from the hive, like the soft lap of a wave on parched sand.

You shift in your seat and keep your eyes on the road. There is nothing you can say to that.

He says, "Promise me that things will be like this forever." The last time you saw him, his skin had swelled and expanded in the water. He didn't hold your hand when you begged him.

You hardly recognize him with green eyes.

"I can't," you tell him.

"Then lie to me."

You've never been a good liar, even to yourself. You press your foot like lead against the accelerator, fifteen above the speed limit, and he gazes out the window. He rolls down the glass and sticks his arm out into open air, bobbing it up and down like beats on a heart monitor. Over and under. You sneak a glance from the corner of your eye. Over and under.

What did it feel like to go under? What did it feel like to watch his final breath dissolve into bubbles above him? What did it feel like to drop to the bottom, to examine the streetlights through rippling water? Did he know that from that moment, every story would return to him? If you turn to your right and see him there, he might disappear.

The sky explodes into color.

"This is going to end the same way," you say. You both know it already, so you might as well voice it. Memory has yet to fade into the background—your city skyline waves goodbye in the rearview mirror. The river to your left becomes a swimming pool against the sunrise. You can almost taste chlorine in the air.

Summertime says, "Keep driving," and you wonder why you want to save him at all. A moment longer, and the feeling has passed.