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Badge

Lydia Copeland Gwyn

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Lydia Copeland Gwyn

BADGE

I wear my body like a badge. I'm tall, so I stand taller, pull back my shoulders, feel the stretch of stomach muscles, naval, spine, lungs. Wedding myself to myself in a kind of midlife matrimony. At home, no one hears my motherly voice, nor my motherly thoughts. And some days, this is just how I like it. Other days, I want my family to pay attention. I want my husband to ask for my opinion and not to dismiss it when it's given. Spring is here and soon Easter will come with its entourage—Good Friday and Dyngus, the latter of which we don't celebrate down here in Tennessee. I drive to Walmart for more necessities. I go alone and shop the aisles. High-wattage bulbs reflect in the shine of the floor. I pass families. Children walking alongside and holding onto the metal rims of shopping carts. A woman with her arms full of sodas. Workers stacking, stocking, unboxing, inventorying items with portable scanners. I fill my basket with all the things on my list and some impulse buys—two kinds of toothpaste, a package of soap—12 bars, bananas, coffee, a packet of zinnia seeds, a tube of red lipstick, and a polka dot top. Outside, the day is sunny but cold. The land around the store used to house a factory that manufactured rayon. Now it's a superfund site with hardly a named thing in its blurred fields. Unless you were to name the broken bricks. The collapsed walls. The toothless windows and smokeless stacks. The fading white paint of someone's words. When I cross the parking lot, I stare into the empty land, it's dry dearth, golden as an autumn day, and I speak with my mind. I imagine in a few decade's time there will be poplars again. Redbuds, serviceberries, mulberries, dogwoods. Meadowsweet, sedges

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and sages, ferns and willows. I imagine wild roses with
their buttered throats. Seeds like lymphocytes in the blood,
vacuuming, repairing. Volunteering their talents. What a
lovely voice you have, says the land.