**Virgin Lake**

Luke Lemmon

The dusted trail splits, a surprise

divergence. Hesitation, then head

left, we can always turn back. When dust

catches up, still unsure, we pause

on path cut through slope, shed

all our packs like clothes into long grass.

We stretch, rub tired muscles, skin

tinged black-purple from weight. We

start a fire on the path, pulling grass

from root to feed it. We hang a tent

from a tree, delirious, shriek laughter,

smoke dancing through us, filling

our lungs, no room for worry.

Night horrors, conjured by me, tales

of warped monsters reaching from

the unzipped door. A hand grasps

my shoulder, pulls me screaming

to a bush. We hold our breaths, eyes

wide with excitement, no noise,

no movement. We wait for what

comes next, blood pounding, alive.

We scratch at the closed two-man

tent, shake the supports, milk every

last doubt in the creases of their

minds. They say they aren’t scared,

with the zipper taped shut. The frame

collapses. Snapped poles buckle under

vinyl. We laugh, bed inside, a view

of the stars through the mesh.

Four of us; me left middle, awake,

restless. The celestial scene pulls

my gaze left, to my friend, asleep.

Years of friendship now drawn to

his thin body, spotless skin stretched

over sinew and bone. My heart

beats full tilt, my stomach churns,

pushing its way out my throat to

take control. I can barely breathe.

My hand moves slowly to rest over

his stomach, feeling the pulse, the

rhythmic rise and fall of sleep

through the thick bag. I

don’t close my eyes after

that. I am an addict.