**Village Life**

Scott Lowery

Transplants from the city, we’ve always loved how dark

the nights are near the edge of this little town,

its few dozen houses, neat and unremarkable,

platted loosely around school, frog pond, limestone

church. Early on, before climbing into my car

in the icy dark, I’d stand for a moment gazing up:

Orion’s belt, the Dippers with steady Polaris, firming me

in place. Most of our neighbors are anchored by family names,

block letters chiseled in granite among the cedars.

Every week, the strict bronze notes of hymns bounce back

from the nearby bluffs, though no one’s ever suggested

we might like to join. When our haphazard trees stretch out

above the yards on either side, they get sawn off.

We’ve lived here thirty years—there are still surprises.

Back home after time away, and what’s this midnight light

in our darkened bedroom, shifting and blinking?

Across the street, a brand-new Stars-and-Stripes,

big as a bedsheet, now glows all night in a halogen beam

that brings to mind a movie prison break. Cool breeze

ripples the flag and toggles our ceiling’s shadow play,

off-and-on, like some sleepless night in a cheap motel

where the neon sign repeats its vacant message,

spotless as an unread Bible, or the dawn’s early light.