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Matt's Sestina

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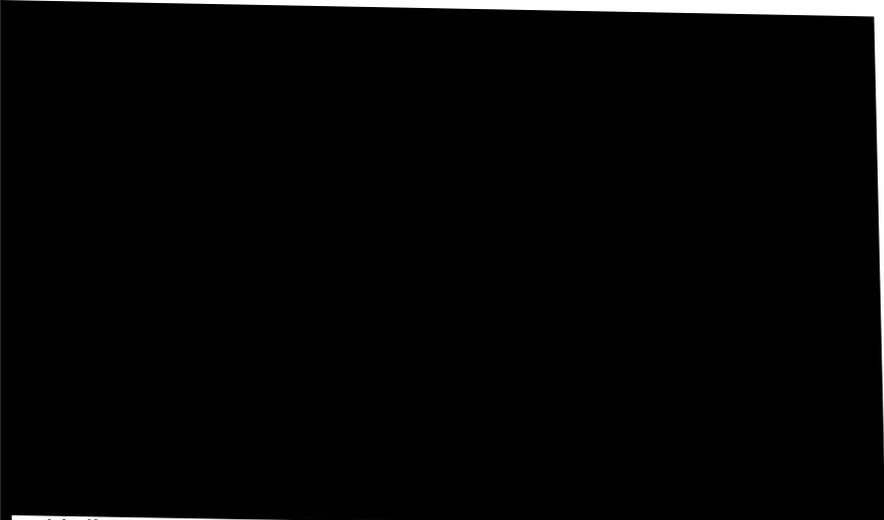
MATT'S SESTINA

KELLY GRANITO

I discovered a porno shop on a strip of pothole-smattered road
one hopeless night on the outskirts of this gray city.
It was located between a dilapidated pizzeria and shabby white home
with broken window shutters that swung every which way.
A neon purple billboard out front read "The Velvet Touch"
in large, cursive letters that had faded over time.

The way it brooded over the street like a shrewd owl summoned me. Time
stopped the moment I parked out on the battered road,
to be abandoned in my car as I scuffled through the heavy doors. A sound
touched
my ears; a quiet voice escorting a subtle mouth. I'm Matt, he said, and the city
seems weary tonight, don't I think? He sat still behind the register. The weight
of his words was heavy with the need for home,

for bed, for sleep. He asked why I wasn't at home
so late at night? I guess sometimes
I just need to go for a drive, I said. I looked the other way
toward a pleather heel on a metal shelf. I felt the urge to dart out to the road
and forget ever coming here to this dingy place, but I knew the gray city
was terribly lonely. He knew it too, and touched



to his lips a cigarette that rested smugly on the counter. I wanted him to touch
my guts with his sad, strange eyes, take him home
to forget about the dildos and nipple clamps, to zigzag across this gray city
to my street, to my front door, to my windowsill, to kill time
watching the transients get lost on the unpaved roads
just trying to make their way

around in the heavy smog. Instead, he showed a drunk old man the way
to the magazine section, and looked at me oddly as he awkwardly touched
a pen to a pad of paper. He doodled a menacing sun which rode
a blue stallion into the wide sky. He told me that his friend had turned his home
into a tattoo parlor, and he just needed some time
to practice before getting a job out there, away from this part of the city.

His drawing was awful, so I laughed and forgot about the city
that sprawled, slept, and smirked around us. We never spoke of going home.
We discussed music and the lack of customers and at some time
in the next hour we spoke briefly of Hank Chinaski. We touched
our fingers to the dust on the countertop and in a silent bewildering way,
I implored whatever God existed there to tow my car from the side of the road.

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When the time came to finally make my way home,
things were different. The roads seemed new, the air pure, the city clean.
Matt touched the barrel to his temple and thought of stallions for the last time.